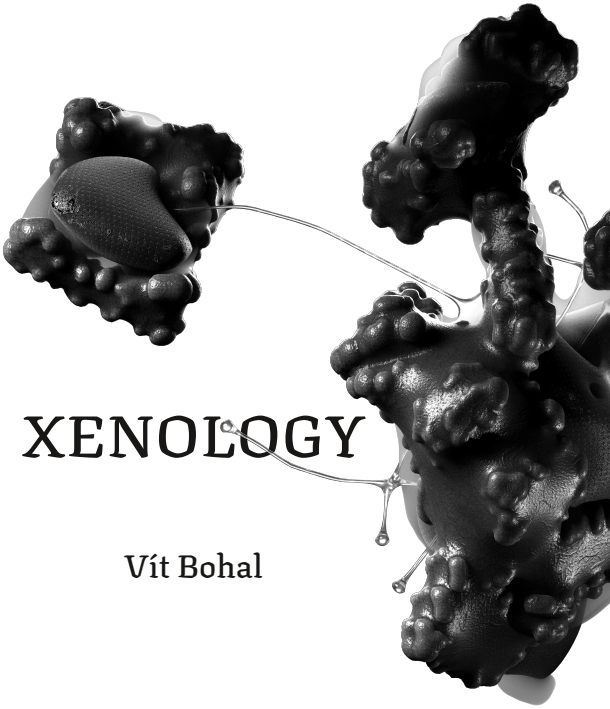

XENOLOGY

Vít Bohal

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Prague, 2025

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introduction

The initial idea for this book developed from an empirical observation: the increased use of the prefix 'xeno-' for various theoretical, philosophical and artistic projects developing over the course of the 2010s and onwards. The recent decade has seen a great explosion of the use of the morpheme 'xeno,' and such iterations often reference a very wide array of items and epistemic methods – xenobiology, xeno-archeology, xeno-architecture, xenofeminism, xenopoetics, *Xenoslavia*, *Xenotopia*... The list goes on, and Part III – Sightings: a xenoglossary, offers a xenoglossary of the contemporary xeno in the textual wild for added reference.[1] This increased frequency of use has provided a vantage point from which to observe the contemporary cultural situation, and it is the task of this publication to offer a plausible analysis by providing a historical overview of the use of the 'xeno' morpheme, but also to propose a tentative typology for better assessing its relevance in the now and into the future.

The general methodology may be well illustrated by an introductory, formal point: the xeno has most often been used as a prefix or alternately as part of a word brace – xenobiology, xenobots, xenofeminism, xenopatterning...; such is the double bind of any xenoword: it is riven between the main noun (here, the taxonomical host of '-biology,' '-bots,' '-feminism') and the parasitic signifier of the xeno. In the present situation, this morpheme often injects a degree of semantic nebulosity into an established taxonomical frame: We could assume that 'xenofeminism' or 'xenobiology' are generally thought to be theories of feminism and biology first and foremost; meaning that 'xeno-' is employed as a prefix modifying the main noun. Xenology, however, inverts this formal relationship, taking the xeno itself as its main object of focus. As part of such a project, it must then also frame a robust signification for the xeno as such, working transversally, across diverse fields and taxonomies. This is the particular task of comparative xenology (CX) discussed in Part II of this book, which builds on this textual trompe l'oeil: Much like Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit illusion works on an inversion of the relationship between the figure and the ground, so too does xenology prompt the question of the xeno on the backdrop of established taxonomies.

Xenology has existed in the anglophone imaginarium for almost 70 years. Part I of this book attempts to cut a historiographic arc from the original formulation of the speculative science of xenology by Robert Heinlein in 1954 through to Robert J. Freitas' 1979 book *Xenology: An Introduction to the Scientific Study of Extraterrestrial Life, Intelligence, and Civilization*, culminating in an analysis of a series of artworks and writings by Polish neo-avantgarde artist Krzysztof Wodiczko from the 1990s.[2]

It will become clear that Wodiczko's xenology functions as a sort of turning point, insofar as "xenology" for the first time acquired a concrete object of study: the lived planetary experience. Where xenology had originally been formulated as a candidly speculative trope of science fiction literature, it is in Wodiczko's avant-garde practice and theory that it finds its object in the social life worlds of various planetary strangers and the developing zeitgeist of pervasive, planetary-scale alienation.

Part I further discusses the diachronic permutations of the fascinating, fictional narratives woven around notions of alien intelligence, technology, alternative biologies and 'other' modes of being. The main argument for this section consists in charting a conclusive trajectory of xenology from its original definition as a speculative science lacking an object (i.e. an actual extraterrestrial civilization) into a social science more oriented on the question of alienation and foreignness within the contemporary political situation – it is a theory for and by those marked by strangeness, the unhomely amongst and within 'us.'

The historical analysis continues with a look at the remediation of the xeno into the digital sphere, particularly in the work of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit. The works of Nick Land and Sadie Plant foremost provide access to the reformulation of the xeno on new terms – namely those of cyberpositivity. And indeed, a fundamental argument of comparative xenology is found in the parallax between the 'xeno's' traditional social grounding and its willful evacuation through abduction into a post-cybernetic frame whose fundamental structuring principle is of cyberpositivity. A central argument of this publication is that the meaning and wider connotations of the prefix xeno became hijacked at this point in time, as the xeno came to spell a transcendent and technocratic evacuation of humanity on the wings of nascent technocapital. In the works of Nick Land

especially, the xeno became tethered to the final solution to the problem of human sociality, rather than approaching it through the outcomes of the contemporary posthuman shift. Such a philosophical hijacking has tended towards antihumanism and has, amongst other things, in recent years come to support a xeno collusive with the neo-reactionary and xenophobic imaginarium. And certain art-theory projects of the 2010s (such as left accelerationism, xenofeminism and xenoarchitecture, discussed at length in Part II) aimed to resocialize the xeno by explicitly resolving its reactionary backdrop while reclaiming its productive ethical and political potential.

This potential can be found in the xeno's signification as a synthetic ethic of becoming which is simultaneously artificial/constructed (i.e. a 'becoming-with,') as much as a political ethic (i.e. 'being-with'). This synthesis allows for the simultaneous co-existence of variously alienated entities and its philosophical agenda explicitly attempts to wrest the xeno from the transcendental, sublime, and often implicitly xenophobic, mindset, rather aiming to reclaim the xeno as a general theory of hospitality and an envelope for the common praxis of productive alienation. This question as to what degree the xeno is a force of a sublime, technical and transcendent Outside,[3] and to what degree it remains enmeshed with the primordial practices of sociality, hospitality, hostility, otherness or caretaking is not trivial and finds resonance in much of contemporary theory dealing with the signification of the xeno today.[4]

The 'xeno' morpheme has reached a very high frequency of use in the sphere of philosophy and contemporary art-theory and it is the objective of comparative xenology (CX) to crystallize a typology of its synchronic semantics, study its iterations in the now, and gain insight into the current cultural situations from which it develops. The theoretical register of comparative xenology aims to answer questions such as: Where to situate the politics of the xeno and what might they tell us about alienation under conditions of planetarity? What is its stake in the future and what role can it play as a general synthesis for such a value structure?

In line with its transversal methodology, CX posits three modes which come to circumscribe the xeno today: the figural, the procedural, and the inhuman. It is the wager of CX that these ideal types accounting for the xeno in contemporary anglophone discourse reflect the particular

manifestations of the contemporary xeno, and that various xenoprojects (see the xenoglossary in Part III – Sightings: a xenoglossary) come to support the typology offered by CX. Three case studies will be used to concretely illustrate its modes: xenofeminism, xeno-architecture, and xenoplanetarity.[5]

The figural mode of comparative xenology anchors the scale of strangeness and alienation through a figural focalizer. This mode is experienced at the scale of bodies, where it explores and calibrates the processes of intersubjective reflection, mirroring, and engagement. Working at the scale of the 'body,' the figural xeno explores the particular hierarchies, categorizations, and normative traits of intersubjective relations (which are often encountered and navigated as the dialectic of self/other).

Of the three modes, the **figural mode** is the one most explicitly indicated in the semantics of the most often used xenoconcept – 'xenophobia.' It is in this sense integrally anthropocentric and draws heavily on the original Greek concept of *xenos* (i.e. "stranger" or "guest-friend"). But the figural mode is also found to be vicariously engaged with social protocoling, and in this sense it invariably indicates the (often unconscious) politics, procedures, and technologies through which bodies are perceived and filtered and the ways their diverse significations of the alien are accounted for.

But looking at the *xenos* merely as the concept of a figural 'stranger,' which is often the base for any intimations of the xeno, threatens to bypass the procedural context which is integral to its signification. If technology is a form of membrane (as e.g. posed by anthropologist and philosopher André Leroi-Gourhan and developed by Bernard Stiegler or Yuk Hui), it must also function as a filter for the phenomenology of the alien as a procedural praxis. This is the context of xenia, or the politics and procedurality of hospitality as imagined and performed in a given society or system.[6] And it is here that the systemics which mark others as strange become consciously reflected in the irreducible social choreography which interpellates the strange as strange, and which determines the procedural practices and ideologies of symbiosis, commensalism, and parasitism, as well as the politics of hostility and hospitality.

The figural stranger is in this way always nested within a particular procedurality of its ground and the social, linguistic, technical, and legal conditions within which they are identified as such. The technical aspects of such an undertaking are a fundamental aspect of

xenological discourse. The xeno has often appeared as a signifier in certain strands of digital culture and also engages with cybernetic thinking as a systems theory focused on the workings of power and iterative (i.e. reproducible) control. From the perspective of philosophy, such cybernetics are a fundamental problem for western metaphysics. In the thought of Nick Land and Sadie Plant, for example,[7] cybernetics have come to constitute a conceptual wedge which opens a problematic gap in the classical phenomenology of Being, and the queastion then is, what happens under the post-cybernetic condition we are currently experiencing?

This conflict between traditional philosophical ontologies and the new, process-oriented and procedural landscape was revisited with explicit relation to the xeno in the 1990s work of University of Warwick's Cybernetic Culture Research Unit, especially in the work of its two consecutive directors – Sadie Plant and Nick Land. this para-academic think tank adopted a theoretical and practical answer to this contradiction through framing their own "cyberpositive" technological landscape, offering an important, yet reactionary, view onto the formulation of the xeno within this new situation. The second mode of comparative xenology is then the **procedural mode** which attempts to grapple with just such contexts of technically-mediated alienation under planetary conditions.

Here, one must be careful not to discuss technology as a universal force, as a technological determinism working in cahoots with liberal transhumanism. A more fitting epistemology addressing the nature of contemporary procedural systems rather draws on the social context within which such technologies are embedded. A more nuanced view of the dynamics, dispositions, and affordances of technologies rather shows techné's integral connection to the habituated life worlds of the social and political registers of its 'users.' It is also upon this backdrop that Hong-Kong based philosopher Yuk Hui frames his concept of "technodiversity."[8] Hui's technodiversity interprets technology along vectors rooted in the diverse epistemologies, ontologies, and ethics which have empirically developed as tools and interfaces mediating between the interiority of a political self-consciousness and the wider world. Such a philosophical approach would be granular enough to explore the diversity and alterity inherent in the multi-actor networks comprising contemporary technics, and may help overwrite the paranoid imaginarium

of a deterministic and regressive cybernetics (re)acting as a hegemonic force to its own fracturing. Technodiversity thus opens a space to reflect the plurality of social and localized groundings of technology and its manifest uses.

Such an analysis furthermore assumes critical self-reflection on the part of the critical apparatus itself, as tools of theory struggle to keep pace with the tools of techné as manifest in the world. Writing for *e-flux* magazine in 2017, Yuk Hui comments that it is necessary

> to fragment the world according to difference instead of universalizing through the same; to induce the same through difference, instead of deducing difference from the same. A new world-historical thinking has to emerge in the face of the meltdown of the world.[9]

In other words, in the new situation of the 2010s and beyond, it becomes necessary to renegotiate politics beyond the futurist, accelerationist and trans-humanist proclivities constructed from the detritus of the cyberpositive 1990s. Since the advent of digital platforms (eminently conceptualized by Nick Srnicek as "platform capitalism")[10] and increasing planetary-scale saturation in computing technologies and internet coverage,[11] digital spaces are at once threatened by their hollowing out under the aegis of a new technofeudalism,[12] but on the other hand have become all the more pervasive, granular, distributed, and thus engaged with their social choreographies.

These new actors have furthermore found various positions in relation to the solidification of state and private governance systems – for example, where in China we see the solidification of its own national internet stack, or the thickening of the state database qua social network WeChat,[13] European politics at federal level have recently turned to reterritorializing its digital space under a federal mandate, often bringing them in direct conflict with the liberal protocol of Silicon Valley tech giants such Microsoft, Apple, Google, Meta and Amazon, as well as adopting a harder stance to Russian-backed disinformation campaigns.[14] Although the general trend to centralization within the federal/state envelope is similar, the means and actual methods are not the same. Such developments are in fact less a harbinger of hegemonization at the hands of a rabid surveillance technocracy (i.e. a form of conspiratorial 'great Other') but rather

manifest the particular diversity and malleability of technical systems as they develop and are maintained across the planet.

Following the space opened by the xeno-architecture project discussed in this book, CX aims to develop a critical position which would undermine the generic apparatus of Critique (with a capital C) through nuanced and 'case-sensitive' critique (with a lower c). It is in this register that CX is invested in the opportunity to repurpose critical tools to work with contemporary procedural systems in the philosophical idiom at proper scale.

The procedural mode assesses technical systems in their role as a membrane between the social sphere and its outside, opening onto the **inhuman mode** of comparative xenology. The most palpable aspect of such an opening is certainly found through the findings and possibilities of natural science (such as astronomy, biology, ecology…), but there are other significations besides – foremost among them is that 'outside' which is replete with sociality, or what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls the ongoing situation of 'planetarity.' Within the limit of the idiom of environmental connotations, or what Spivak has defined as "contemporary planet-talk,"[15] the inhuman aspect of the xeno undoubtedly denotes an encounter with natural, chthonic systems and deep planetary patterns which transcend the constructed self-image of the human; but that is not all there is. Human subjectivity and agency cannot be non-trivially evacuated, and comparative xenology in this sense always retains the integral relevance of sociality and its structuring principle of the human. The inhuman mode of xenology expands the phenomenal territory of xenological analysis from the procedural workings of *xenia* to the wider environment of the planet, but its theory rather rests on the paradoxical 'social outside' of planetarity. The xeno sensibility then adds a mode of discourse beyond environmental "planet talk," and begs questions about the ethical limits of belonging and the position of generative rationality in framing the human self-image under planetary conditions. Such a reflection not only provides an aesthetic mirror but has palpable impact on humanity's being and co-becoming on the level of planetary existence.

Following the philosophy of Reza Negarestani, the inhuman mode of comparative xenology comes to signify a particular labor of rationality – such a form of rationality explicitly retains 'the human' as a strategically employed concept, one that remains mutable and synthetic,

and integrally capable of being extrapolated and exapted beyond its present connotations. For Negarestani, the "labor of the inhuman" consists in the constant bootstrapping of the concept of 'humanity' into existence, and it is here that the inhuman xeno comes to signify a problematically sustainable ethic for the rights and conditions of planetary humanity. That in no way rejects the relevance of more-than-human, planetary actors nor subsumes their relevance, but neither does it foreclose mutation of its self-image within the logic of synthetic hybridity and advancing alienation. Like the allegorical Theseus' ship, the concept of rational humane conduct is to be constantly dismantled, reassessed, and repurposed.

Rather than assuming any sublime revolution which might evacuate the concept of the human as a final solution to the question of political difference, the inhuman then comes to signify as an ever-receding concept of humanity – one which, however, cannot be evacuated for reasons of dishonest sense-making. In the present state of planetary politics, rational subjectivity thus manifests as a carrier and focalizer of a particular praxis and ethics. The inhuman in this sense comes to comprise a stratum for the cultivation of contemporary alienation as a rational endeavor. Inhuman rationality, in other words, assumes the conditions of *the irruption of the social* as a non-reducible aspect of planetary reality. One can perhaps allude to the idea of Rocco's basilisk (that is, minus the executive vengeance which the original hyper-rationalist idea came to denote)[16] not as applied to the specular superintelligence to come, but rather the intelligences already present as planetary actors, insisting on their relevance and affirming their right to life. The question of the social then comes as a fundamental strategy for orienting planetary praxis.

CX's theory of inhuman social diversity finds its conceptual lynchpin in the aforementioned concept of "planetarity" (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak). If planetarity consists of an irreducible alterity commensurate with the experience of the lived planet, the structuring of rationality along social lines must not be regarded as a universalist project (i.e. in the sense of a Humanist universality predicated on the abstraction, smoothing and leveling of difference which is assumed by a universal conception of, in the first and last instance, a hegemonic humanity) but rather as an appreciation of the striation and irreducible diversity of planetary culture and practice.

Inhuman planetarity must in this sense build on this objective affects and kinetics. While Spivak originally defined planetarity as a form of sociality sensitive to the alterities of the contemporary planet in its lived manifestations, Reza Negarestani's assumption of reason as a constructed phenomenon provides a frame for the inhuman re-construction of the concept of 'the human' along planetary lines. The continuing commitment to humanity – based in what Rosi Braidotti has called a 'strategic anthropocentrism' –[17] thus comes to be enacted as a mutable gesture which grounds the ethics of xeno-planetarity as irreconcilable to any form of mono-humanism, rather exploring the potential of agreement developed from a multitude of positions circumscribed by the planetary reality.

The inhuman mode of CX aims, first and foremost, to update the notion of planetarity through the contemporary prism of the xeno – it comes to signify as an inhuman form of rationality able to "dissociat[e] human significance from human glory"[18] (Negarestani). As will become clear throughout the course of this book, such a xeno-planetarity is developed along two premises: 1) it assumes alienation as a positive vector of sociality and planetary existence, one which has become a new universal standing as the negative of monohumanism, and 2) it takes stock of the potential of repurposing and utilizing contemporary architectural and technological means towards generally emancipatory – that is *hospitable* – ends.

The book explores the iterations which have accreted around the signifier of the xeno over the past few decades and contextualizes its non-reducible social grounding. Following Irit Rogoff, the current shift in theory and critique is not simply about "an expansion of the subjects of research but is about new research drives propelled just as much by lived conditions as by inherited formal knowledges."[19] These new conditions of "precarity, scarcity, sustainability, legal uncertainty, security, and financialization [...] necessarily shape subjects, methodologies, and audiences of research."[20] Comparative xenology picks up on this wager and aims to develop a relevant position for addressing the zeitgeist of alienation within the planetary context with a view to the experience of alienation (and anxiety) so often associated with it. Such a project is explicitly dedicated to the necessity of retaining social ethics as a space for negotiation and discourse, one where culture and technology, art and language, as

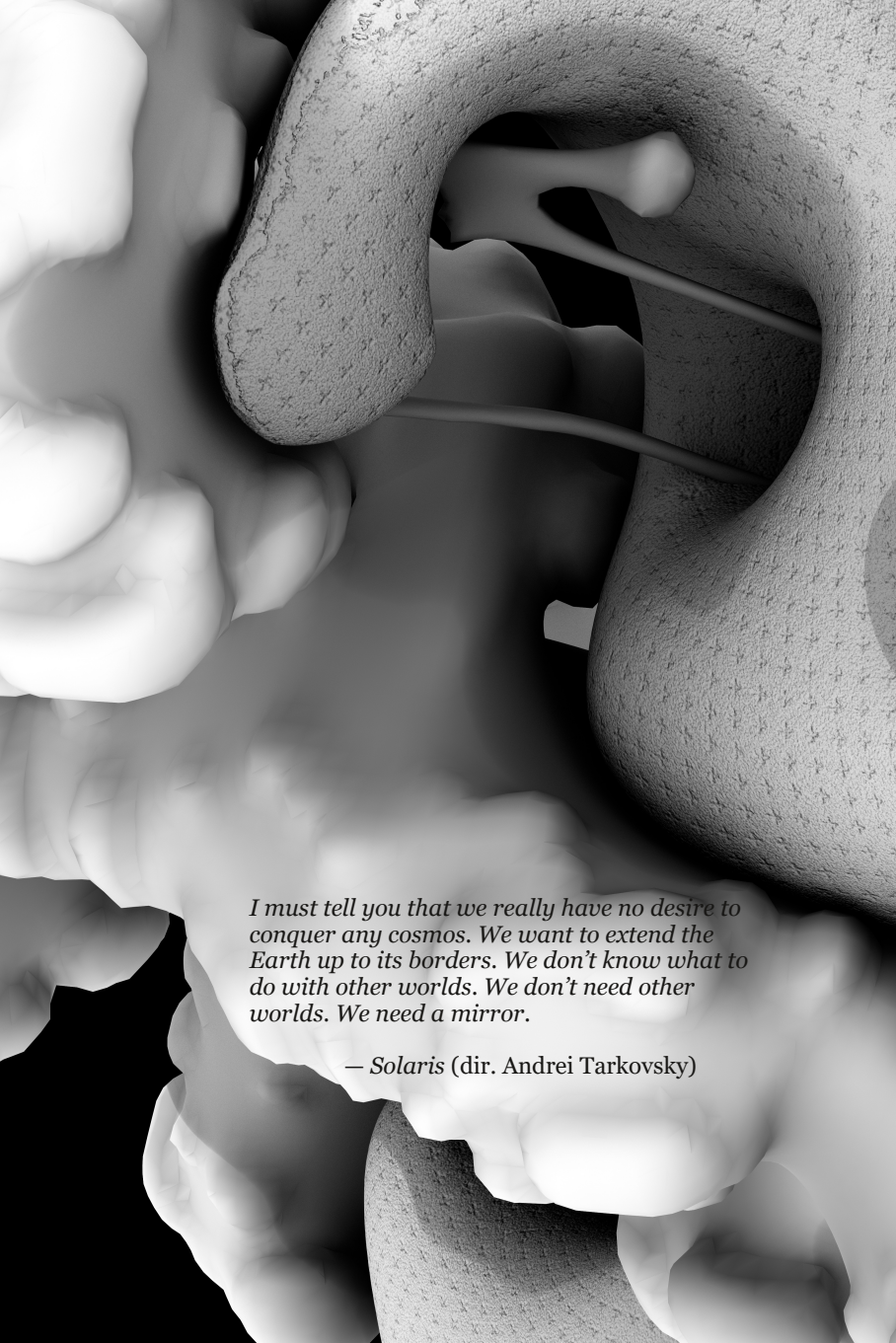
much as the technical, scientific, geological, atmospheric, and cosmic processes, constitute vectors of human estrangement from its previous self-image, while also providing the means for its reconstruction in the now.

Xenology is not what it used to be since its inception in the latter half of 20th century, yet similar questions pertaining to the legitimacy of alienation, the space of the planet and the wider cosmos, and the issue of infrastructural emergence are explored on the backdrop of the developing cultural, technological and scientific milieux. The work thus has no alternative but to assume its own subject position as an integral feature of the text, making no claim to an ideal theory or final solution of any sort. On the one hand, it aims to formulate an open-ended proposition about the potentialities of a phenomenology of alienation, while at the same time aiming to offer a robust position for the xeno which would stand against any reduction, abduction, and weaponization by the various (neo)reactionary discourses of the past decades.

Particularly in these Anglo-American discourses, we often find the 'xeno' as a meme and buzzword semantically tied to the neoreactionary paranoid politics, where it is often propped up to say just enough to sow fear and anxiety without actually ever being defined in any productive sense. Perhaps this analysis of the xeno can serve as a productive point of departure and a counterweight to attempts at its hijacking into the future. In order to avoid the transcendent catatonia of Benjamin's *Angelus Novus*, who gazes at the detritus of history in rapture, it is necessary to work through the detritus of contemporary planetary politics, and build with a view to the integrality of difference, alterity, and alienation in all of its possible modes – *Xenology* formulates the xeno as just such an attempt.

1. The glossary is an ongoing project hosted at the Diffractions Collective website, see https://diffractionscollective.com/2024/04/19/xenology-a-xenoglossary/.
2. I have in fact tracked down the earliest mention of "xenology" to the Czech occult magazine Isis published in 1906. The article "Úvod do xenologie hudby" ("Introduction to the Xenology of Music") written by Fr. Šídlo offers an exuberant but muddled account of art and music in relation to strangeness in the context of classical Greece. It is, however, a short and poetic piece of writing which has little connection to its current meanings. See Fr. Šídlo, Isis, no .1, vol. 2 (Přerov: October 1906): 1–4.
3. As for example in the work of Nick Land and many of the subsequent projects which employ his transcendent antihumanism as a blueprint, which will be discussed in the following sections.
4.See for example Annie Goh, "Appropriating the Alien: A Critique of Xenofeminism," Mute (29 July 2019), accessed 1 June 2023, https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/appropriating-alien-critique-xenofeminism, and the critical response of Jules Joanne Gleeson, "Breakthroughs and Bait: On Xenofeminism and Alienation," Mute (19 October 2019), https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/breakthroughs-bait-xenofeminism-alienation.
5. It should be noted that xenofeminism and xeno-architecture are established projects, among whose collaborators we find eminent theorists, curators and artists such as Armen Avanessian, Benjamin Bratton, Helen Hester, Amy Ireland, Victoria Ivanova, or Luciana Parisi, while xenoplanetarity is an original concept developed as part of this work, which aims to provoke discussion about the relationship of the xeno to the contemporary situation of planetarity.
6. Although the historical position of xenia within the context of classical Greece will not be the focus of this work, as comparative xenology is rather interested in its contemporary philosophical resonance, the very logic of a socially determined xenia opens a view onto the procedural aspects of alienation.
7. In the essay "Cyberpositive," see chapter **xeno in cyberspace**. Also Martin Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays (New York and London, Garland Publishing 1977); Martin Heidegger, "'Only a God Can Save Us': The Spiegel interview (1966)," Internet Archive, accessed 19 April 2025, https://archive.org/details/MartinHeidegger-DerSpiegelInterviewenglishTranslationonlyAGodCan.
8. Anders Dunker, "On Technodiversity: A Conversation with Yuk Hui," LA Review of Books (9 June 2020), accessed 1 July 2023, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/on-technodiversity-a-conversation-with-yuk-hui/.
9. Yuk Hui, "On the Unhappy Consciousness of Neoreactionaries," e-flux, no. 81 (April 2017) accessed 3 April 2024, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/81/125815/on-the-unhappy-consciousness-of-neoreactionaries/.

10. Nick Srnicek, Platform Capitalism (polity, 2017).
11. Benjamin Bratton, The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2015).
12. See for example Yannis Varoufakis, Technofeudalism: What Killed Capitalism (Melville House, 2024).
13. Nicola Davison, "WeChat: the Chinese social media app that has dissidents worried," The Guardian (7 December 2012) accessed 4 July 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/dec/07/wechat-chinese-social-media-app
14. The politics of the EU in relation to the American technical capital giants such as Google, Facebook, and others shows the contemporary centrality of politics in the development and maintenance of technological platforms. See Justin Nogarede and Jan-Erik Støstad, A Progressive Approach to Digital Tech: Taking Charge of Europe's Digital Future, a FEPS SAMAK report (2020), accessed 4 June 2023, https://samak.info/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/FEPS-SAMAK-A-Progressive-Approach-to-Digital-Tech.pdf; Justin Nogarede, Governing Online Gatekeepers: Taking Power Seriously, policy report (2021), accessed 4 June 2023, https://feps-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/downloads/publications/governing%20online%20gatekeepers%201.pdf. In the case of Russia, the conflict can be gleaned from the recent arrest of Telegram co-founder Pavel Durov, as well as the anti-disinformation campaigns waged at the state level of individual member states. See for example Jennifer Rankin, "Stakes High for European Union after Arrest of Telegram Co-founder," The Guardian (28 August 2024), accessed 28 August 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/aug/28/european-union-arrest-telegram-pavel-durov-law-analysis; Julia Payne, "EU Struggles to Counter Russian Election Disinformation," Reuters (3 June 2024), accessed 28 August 2024, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/european-election-eu-struggles-counter-russian-disinformation-2024-06-03/.
15. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "'Planetarity' (Box 4, WELT)," Paragraph, vol. 38, no. 2 (July 2015): 290-292.
16. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roko%27s_basilisk
17. Rosi Braidotti, Posthuman Feminism (Cambridge: polity, 2022), 38.
18. Reza Negarestani, "Labor of the Inhuman Part II: The Inhuman," e-flux no. 53 (March 2014), accessed 10 June 2023, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/53/59893/the-labor-of-the-inhuman-part-ii-the-inhuman/.
19. Irit Rogoff, "Common Research," New Alphabet School (9 Sept. 2022), accessed 16 September 2022, https://newalphabetschool.hkw.de/common-research/index.html.
20. Irit Rogoff, "Common Research."



I must tell you that we really have no desire to conquer any cosmos. We want to extend the Earth up to its borders. We don't know what to do with other worlds. We don't need other worlds. We need a mirror.

— *Solaris* (dir. Andrei Tarkovsky)

I.
XENOLOGIES

There is a stranger outside your house. He is old, ragged, and dirty. He is tired. He has been wandering, homeless, for a long time, perhaps many years. Invite him inside. You do not know his name. He may be a thief. He may be a murderer. He may be a god. He may remind you of your husband, your father, or yourself. Do not ask questions. Wait. Let him sit on a comfortable chair and warm himself beside your fire. Bring him some food, the best you have, and a cup of wine. Let him eat and drink until he is satisfied. Be patient. When he is finished, he will tell his story. Listen carefully. It may not be as you expect.

— Emily Wilson, "Translator's Preface," *The Iliad*

xenos and xenia: a preamble

In order to talk about the position of the xeno today, we might first question what the xeno has been up until now. Although this work is explicitly not a treatise on classical Greek etymology and semiotics, the Greek epics and dramas do provide a fundamental textual source for the current semantics of the morpheme 'xeno.' Some points in the history of the concept may provide insight on its present-day formulations which, at least in part, develop from classical literary culture and its English translations and exegesis. And although the xeno has numerous valences of meaning in the original Greek context, this study will focus on two which are most determinative and relevant for the study of comparative xenology (CX) and serve as a preamble for its figural and procedural modes respectively: *xenos* and *xenia*.

For contemporary ears, the morpheme appears most often in the form of *xenos* (ξένος), denoting a "stranger" or "guest-friend." It prompts questions of the dialectic of the self/other, or the politics of hostility and hospitality. The second concept is perhaps less generally known, but all the more pertinent to the project of expanding and assessing the semantics of xeno today: *xenia* (ξενια) was the institution of hospitality within ancient Greek culture which determined the social infrastructure and protocolar choreographies surrounding the question of foreigners, along with the hospitality extended to them.[1] Where *xenos* is a figural trope, *xenia* is a systemic one. The morpheme 'xeno' then constitutes not only the root of the aforementioned figural *xenos*, but also of *xenia* – where the first is a classically figural trope, the second denotes a procedural protocol of hospitality in its ideal form as carried by literary culture.

We can follow Emily Wilson in the assertion that such textual sources present the prototypical *xenos* as predominantly male and usually of aristocratic or divine descent.[2] The Homeric epics in particular are replete with tales of aristocratic guest-friends and their hosts both upholding and transgressing the tenets of social reciprocity – for example in the rape of Helen by Paris of Troy and the resulting Trojan war, or the bad hostess Circe who drugs Odysseus and his men, or the return of Odysseus to Ithaca and the slaying of the upstart suitors in *The Odyssey*... In all these examples, we see *xenia* as the ideal

trope which was fundamentally reflectdl within the literary world of classical Greece for the protocols of aristocratic sociality.[3]

Within the textual ideality of the Greek epics, *xenia* was identified with a set protocol of accommodation and a particular syntax of hospitality for the stranger's arrival: welcoming, disarmament, bathing, feeding, and only then interrogation as to their destination and purpose, ideally in that order. The transgression of this code led to strife, bloodshed and war.[4]

One can say that the *xenos* remains tethered to an *imaginary* cultural and literary tradition whose *real* relation to strangers has rather been marked by ambivalence, extractivism, subjugation, and enslavement. But in the contemporary context of planetary thinking, such dynamics have become outscaled and require fundamental recalibration: what if a terrestrial stranger is never indexical to any fetishized anthropogenic 'outside,' but rather to the lived experience of our planet? And what to make of this unhomely, increasingly and progressively alienated knot of guest-host relations?

In her new translation of *The Odyssey*, Emily Wilson writes that her project constitutes an attempt to revise the canonical modern translations of the classical epic and avoid the impulse to "normalize or valorize the treatment of non-Western people as monsters." It also aims to restructure the "importing [of] contemporary types of sexism"[5] into *The Odyssey* text over its long translation history. Wilson in this sense considers the classical textual representations of xenia as androcentric and patriarchal:

> What is distinctive about the customs surrounding hospitality in [Greek] culture is that elite men who have entered one another's homes and have been entertained appropriately are understood to have created a bond of 'guest-friendship' (xenia) between their households that will continue into future generations. Guest-friendship is different from philia, the friendship, affection, love, and loyalty that connects a person to his or her family members and neighborhood friends.[6]

Xenia in the traditional sense was then indicative of a bond made legible by a homosocial politics of power – entered into with one's (male) equals, and excluding

those whose executive powers seemed irrelevant to the task at hand. Here, structural power validates further structural power. Wilson continues:

> Xenia [...] is a networking tool that allows for the expansion of Greek power, from the unit of the family to the city-state and then across the Mediterranean world. It is the means by which unrelated elite families can connect to one another as equals, without having to fight for dominance.

In Wilson's sense, the ideal praxis of xenia was indicative of a certain level of social privilege which was not extended, for example, to women, children or slaves. Neither was it provided to any inhuman subjects and actors.

Contemporary xenology must in this regard pick up on this complex legacy of the semantics of xeno and ask what may be salvaged from the concept of social hospitality, always keeping in view the fraught legacy of power relations and hierarchies which it grows out of. If the contemporary xeno is a soft force, then its changes are more akin to insistent reform – the stranger indeed may no longer be whom we expected.

The "question of the foreigner" approaches the xeno as a non-political (non-agonistic) actor whose incremental degree of otherness is enmeshed with the fundamentally social context of xenia. Although such a social institution of hospitality is not as often reflected compared to the more readily used figural *xenos* or "the stranger,"[7] it is important to understand how a society comes to account for alterity, alienation and difference on the procedural level. What are the social conditions which formulate strangeness today? For whom are they constructed, and what procedural systematics actuate their semiotic connotations? These are some of the questions which are the subject of comparative xenology (and will be discussed in Part II of this book).

A productive vector may consist in revisiting the potential of the xeno in order to decouple it from its habituated negative connotations by, for example, following the line of thinking prompted by Wilson[8] or Amy Ireland[9] in their revisitation of the term 'xenophilia.' What might a new and positive horizon for the xeno entail, and in what ways might the reproductions of executive power

become overcoded by the call to "make kin"[10] within the contemporary planetary frame?

Considering the dynamic development of pervasive computation – including databasing, machine vision or biometrics – questioning the xeno today must particularly emphasize the level of protocol and procedure, for which the institution of xenia provides an important historical metaphor. Contemporary xenology thus asks questions about the technological apparatuses and governance systems which define current protocols for engaging with the foreign – from legal frameworks determinative of citizenship, gender or legal status, to the concrete instruments and apparatuses such as fences, walls, gates, passports, or biometric databases which serve to thicken and enact executive power. With a bit of hyperbole, we can say that *xenia* has crystallized in the form of what Benjamin Bratton has termed "algorithmic governance"[11] and it is in this sense that it must currently be analyzed on its own procedural terms. Such an analysis shifts the weight of the morpheme 'xeno' from the purely interpersonal and homogeneous protocols of interfacial screening towards a wider analysis of the technical milieux which filter, grant and withhold access, and which are directly implicated with the social protocols determining the very position from which the question of the foreigner is presented.

In one of his 1995 Paris lectures which would later be published as *Of Hospitality*, Jacques Derrida echoes the sociologist Émile Benveniste in his assertion that "There is no *xenos*, there is no foreigner, before or outside of *xenia*,"[12] (ital. orig.). The assertion that questions of foreignness and alienation are best framed as systemic, legal, and technological questions helps reground the xeno within its institutional, systemic, and social praxis which has been its domain since classical times. The foreigner is in this regard always nested within a particular social unconscious which mediated by technology. Such a position has more recently been addressed in the works of Judy Wajcman, Donna Haraway, Anna Tsing or Caroline Criado-Perez, and the wider discourse of Science and Technology Studies (STS), which will receive due attention throughout this publication.

The decoupling of the xeno from its figural connotations and its extension toward that of xenia thus extends the question of the foreigner to be, first and foremost, a sociocultural one – the xeno will be shown to be always-already reflexive and explorative of the procedural logics

of constructing and interpellating the foreign. As will become clear, the struggle for the semantics of the xeno is poised at just such an intersection: while some xeno-projects reflect its integral social context, others often irresponsibly use it as a signifier for denoting the evacuation of that very sociality. Comparative xenology then adopts a transversal approach to the construction of the xeno today.

But first, we must come to reflect on the professed methodology of this publication: wheree 'xenology' as an arbitrary and new coinage, the term has been used in the anglophone context since the 1950s. However, it is not as the empirical theory (-ology) one might have expected, but rather as a speculative science developed in the context of post-war science fiction. It is the very position of xenology itself which will be discussed in the following chapter.

1. Pamela Johnston, "'All Strangers and Beggars are from Zeus': Early Greek Views of Hospitality," Pacific Journal, vol. 13 (2018).
2. Emily Wilson, "Introduction," The Odyssey, trans. Emily Wilson (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018). For example, in the case of Odysseus returning after his voyage to Ithaca, revealing himself to be not an old beggar but in fact master of a great domus. Or, as princess Nausicaa says in Book 6 of the Odyssey: "All strangers and Beggars are from Zeus," as Zeus-Xenios was a fundamental aspect of Zeus' identity and he was considered the patron of strangers.
3. For example, in the case of Odysseus returning after his voyage to Ithaca, revealing himself to be not an old beggar but in fact master of a great domus. Or, as princess Nausicaa says in Book 6 of the Odyssey: "All strangers and Beggars are from Zeus," as Zeus-Xenios was a fundamental aspect of Zeus' identity and he was considered the patron of strangers.
4. Steve Reece, The Stranger's Welcome: Oral Theory and the Aesthetics of the Homeric Hospitality Scene (University of Michigan Press, 1993).
5. Emily Wilson, "Introduction," The Odyssey, trans. Emily Wilson (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018), 85 [e-pub].
6. Wilson, 29.
7. The most-often used English word which uses the prefix xeno – xenophobia – indeed denotes the fear of strangers.
8. Wilson, 29.
9. Amy Ireland, "Alien Rhythms," Litteraria Pragensia, vol. 29, no. 58 (December 2019), 64.
10. Donna J. Haraway, Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene (Duke University Press, 2016), 102.
11. Benjamin Bratton, The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2015); Benjamin Bratton, "On Software and Sovereignty," interview by Alexander Pisarev, INRUSSIA (2016–2017), accessed May 31, 2022, https://inrussia.studio/on-software-and-sovereignty.
12. Jacques Derrida, Of Hospitality (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 29.

xenology genesis: from sci-fi to the world at hand

In his 1961 news column entitled "Xenobiology," Harold Wooster wrote about "the nominalistic problem" of the absence "of a generic prefix for the sciences concerned with the study of extraterrestrial autochtons."[1] He was, in other words, asking for a science for the study of possible extraterrestrial intelligence. In the article, he quotes a personal letter he received from Robert Heinlein in 1954,[2] in which the acclaimed sci-fi author proposes the term "xenobiology" for just such a science. Heinlein considered the prefix 'xeno-' as a better alternative than the prefix 'exo-' (i.e. 'exobiology') as '-exo' is too nebulous, "tired and mean[ing] too many things."[3] He finds the 'xeno-' prefix to be "the best choice from the standpoint of derivation." In the particular context of biology, Heinlein considers and compares the utility of three prefixes – 'xeno-,' 'astro-,' and 'exo-' – finding "xenobiology" to be "the best of these three in the interest of clarity and exactness."[4]

In the same year as the arrival of the letter, we find the very earliest use of the general science of 'xenology' appearing in Heinlein's 1954 novel *The Star Beast*.[5] There it denotes the science of xenobiology but expanded into an overall study of an alien race which exceeds its mere physical aspects. In the book, Commissioner Greenberg speaks about non-terrestrial races and defines the field as follows:

> "Xenologists have found that high types, equivalent to humans, always have three characteristics: speech centers, manipulation, and from these two, record keeping. [...] Studied any xenology?"
> "Not much, sir," John Thomas admitted shyly, "except books I could find in the library. But I mean to major in xenology and exotic biology in college."
> "Good for you. It's a wide open field. You'd be surprised how difficult it is to hire enough xenists."[6]

The quote shows that in this early instance, the fictional trope of xenology denoted a field very much similar to xenobiology, insofar as both constituted a study of extra-

terrestrial life forms. 'Xenology' afterwards continued to be used as a trope for this speculative science focusing on extraterrestrial life forms in science fiction also on the other side of the Iron Curtain. In the Soviet context, we find a notable reference in the Strugatsky brothers' 1972 novel *Roadside Picnic*, where the character of Dr. Valentine Pilman defines xenology followingly:

> I have to warn you, Richard, that your question falls under the umbrella of a pseudoscience called xenology. Xenology is an unnatural mixture of science fiction and formal logic. At its core is a flawed assumption—that an alien race would be psychologically human.[7]

Other examples where this speculative science of xenology is mentioned include Orson Scott Card's novels *Speaker for the Dead* (1986) and *Xenocide* (1991).[8] Even more recently, Liu Cixin in his *The Three Body Problem* trilogy (2008–2010) uses the trope of "cosmic sociology" which is defined as an eliminative science for the study of alien evolutionary physiology and social etiology, i.e. the original xenology under another name.[9]

These examples show that xenology as a speculative science has been integrally linked to the discourse of 'science-fiction.' But where the genre of sci-fi has been increasingly rebranded as 'speculative fiction,' this theoretical concept of speculative fiction and its connotations again originates with Heinlein in 1941. It was later popularized in his 1947 essay "On the Writing of Speculative Fiction."[10] There, he writes that in speculative fiction "accepted science and established facts are extrapolated to produce a new situation, a new framework for human action."[11] These fictions, in other words, build on the realism of the present to extrapolate alternate, thinkable futures. Heinlein is quick to add that such a frame is also predicated on crisis: a "new situation" leads to "new human problems [being] created — and our [speculative fiction] story is about how human beings cope with those new problems."

It was literary icon Margaret Attwood who notably contrasted science fiction with speculative fiction – although her *Handmaid's Tale* (1985) has been lauded as an achievement in science fiction, the author prefers the label of speculative fiction, which for her denotes plots which "could really happen." She assumes speculative fiction to be in contrast to the science fiction genre, which

she considers a genre based in fantastical tricks and improbable plots. For Atwood, sci-fi is the stuff of pulp fiction while speculative fiction is the stuff of imagination.[12]

With the advent of the so-called New Wave of science fiction in the 1960s and 1970s, the boundary between technological *science* and social *fiction* provided a basis for the now-common distinction between 'soft' and 'hard' sci-fi, with the more traditional, hard sci-fi rather associated with the genre's Golden Age of the late 1930s and 1940s. Heinlein himself considered such works to focus on "gadgets" and technologies rather than on the wider social contexts within which such technologies existed. The turn towards soft sci-fi of the New Wave became rather more reflexive and developed literary tropes which exceeded the imaginarium of technological penetration and, especially in the case of the American sci-fi, increasingly engaged with the social life worlds and countercultural tropes which were percolating in the Americas at the time. These often focused on the issues and problems of their era and consciously referenced the wider cultural situations which framed them, often proposing speculative and futuristic solutions to the problems at hand: the works of Ursula K. LeGuin, Margaret Attwood or later Octavia Butler are just some of the examples of speculative fiction writers whose works focused on the probabilities and potentialities of societal, rather than merely technological, transformation and development within an explicitly future-oriented idiom.

But in 1979, xenology was notably framed within yet another context – Robert Freitas jr.'s[13] exuberant work *Xenology: An Introduction to the Scientific Study of Extraterrestrial Life, Intelligence, and Civilization* frames a speculative science which explicitly vied for a place in the taxonomy of the natural sciences.[14] There, Freitas speculates on a particular problem of his time – whereas extraterrestrials were still a science-fiction trope in the literary sense, they were yet to be formulated as a distinct material possibility within the discourse of the natural sciences. The greatest problem for such a scientific theory of the extraterrestrial was that the study subject itself, i.e. the extraterrestrials themselves who were missing from empirical observation.

Freitas' *Xenology* thus starts by eclectically discussing the trope of extraterrestrials as it had been framed within the western cannon, and he dedicates the entire second chapter "Extraterrestrial Life: The History of an Idea" to

the cultural, and specifically textual and literary, constructions of extraterrestrial life from pre-historical times to 20th century sci-fi. The subsequent (and much lengthier) part of the book then proceeds to engage with the subject of extraterrestrial life not only as a literary trope but also as a speculative, distinctly material possibility within humanity's expanding view of the natural sciences and the potential exploration of the wider cosmos during and following the Space Age.

Freitas' sprawling treatise remains the most voluminous account using the term "xenology" to date. His work can be understood as an attempt to speculate on extraterrestrial life in a largely figural modality (that is "the ET" or "alien") and his xenology in this regard directly develops the legacy of Heinlein's xenology qua xenobiology, focusing on the potential biological forms of extraterrestrial bodies and intelligences, as well the particular positivist knowledge base and technological conditions – or "gadgets" – which may support their life. Freitas' project also dres heavily on the 'speculative science' of Carl Sagan, David Saunders, Stanton T. Friedman, Thornton Page[15] and other scientists and ufologists, referencing their ideas and empirical findings pertaining to physics, astronomy, and planetology. He uses these more or less conclusive speculations as a point of departure to formulate his own xenology. As Freitas writes, "The issues of xenology are intimately bound up with the features and properties of the physical universe,"[16] and the entire work in this sense engages with the material conditions which may allow for speculating on the existence of advanced, non-terrestrial intelligences within as rigorous a frame as possible.

Drawing on the then-current state of knowledge and its empirical findings, the work speculates on potential realities, using contemporary science and the scientific method as a springboard for extrapolating the 'unknown known' of extraterrestrial life for which both science and fiction come to account. Freitas eloquently discusses the way extraterrestrial life has been approached and presented within the humanities in the past (philosophy and literature in particular) but quickly works to formulate a speculative taxonomy within the idiom of the natural sciences.

Most notable are Freitas' coining of the fields of "xenoarcheology" (i.e. the study of potential alien artefacts), "xenobiology" (the possible physical constitution of extraterrestrial life), "xenopsychology" and "xenosociology,"

(the cultures which ETs might form). And it is interesting to note that two of these fields have in fact resonated within the scientific community since their original formulation and have been picked up by active scholars and scientists, further validating the imaginative validity of Freitas' original speculations. This analysis focuses on two examples which Freitas has formulated in his time, and which have since achieved a notable degree of status as prospective discourses – xenobiology and xenoarcheology.[17]

Freitas defines the field of **xenoarcheology** as "the search for evidence of ancient visitation by interstellar travelers."[18] In reference to the various "ancient astronaut" theories fashionable in his time, he considers it "at best a difficult and confused field of study,"[19] but nevertheless one with a degree of plausibility and worthwhile to pursue. In the literary context, this imaginative science appears for example in Arthur C. Clarke's famous *Rama* tetralogy (1973–1993), but we find earlier iterations in his short story *The Sentinel* (1951) – later adapted into Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In the original story, Clarke envisions an archeological discovery of a megalithic structure on the Earth's Moon, thus invoking a chasm of time towards the deep, cosmic past when an interplanetary orinterstellar ancient unknown intelligence allegedly placed the structure there.[20]

But as Freitas frames xenology as a scientific endeavor, he remains candid about the intricacies of his speculative methodology, consistently maintaining a critical distance from bombastic claims and dishonest science.

He writes:

> Precisely because hopes and expectations are so high, it is often harder to maintain a strong, healthy skepticism. Hence, in the words of astronomer Carl Sagan, "we must accept arguments for extraterrestrial visitations to earth only when the evidence is compelling." At present, an exhaustive survey of all pertinent literature and other evidence fails to uncover a single incontrovertible case of past alien presence on our planet.[21]

And it is highly interesting that xenoarcheology has recently been proposed as a field for further scientific exploration (or, in fact, establishment), albeit without

any direct mention of its literary background nor of Freitas' work. In the essay "A call for proactive xenoarchaeological guidelines – Scientific, policy and socio-political considerations"[22] the Senior Staff Physicist / Radiological Engineer for Axiom Space Ben W. McGee calls for a robust methodology for searching, containing, and processing potential artefacts found beyond the Earth's orbit.[23] For McGee, xenoarcheology ought to formulate a "policy and protocol" for encountering possible non-terrestrial artefacts in the solar system and beyond.

As a concrete example, one of the fundamental considerations for him is the creation of "protocols of non-contamination," which would prevent terrestrial microbes and items from polluting the artefact so that it can be properly studied with the least amount of imported "noise." Following a pragmatic line of reasoning, McGee attempts to chart the blind spots of the current practices of non-terrestrial archeology in order to construct a pre-emptive methodology for approaching a potential alien artefact, attempting to formulate a robust scientific praxis while implicitly speculating upon the potential existence of (and a personal encounter with) traces of non-terrestrial origin.

Shortly after the initial publication, Linda Billings penned a critical response to McGee's essay in which she writes that "what appears to be an attempt to demarcate a new field of study – 'xenoarchaeology' – could be interpreted as an effort to capture some legitimacy for a non-scientific interest by riding on the coat-tails of an established, and thus legitimized, discipline."[24] According to Billings, that discipline is "astrobiology" – "an established, credible and legitimate field of study"[25] researching and speculating the potential biological forms extra-terrestrial life may take.

This discussion not only points to the continuing relevance of the prefix 'xeno' in the natural sciences but also identifies a particular drive to frame this speculative science within an already established taxonomical field (in his case archeology). McGee notes that "It should be noted that the term 'xenoarchaeology', which is reserved specifically for the study of material evidence of astrobiological activity, differs from 'exoarchaeology', which is defined as the archaeological study of human activity in space."[26] He also retains the more common term "astrobiology" for the study of extraterrestrial organisms, and does not use "xenobiology" in its stead.

The second example of an explicitly contemporary xenological debate is that of the original **xenobiology**, formulated by Robert Heinlein in his 1954 letter to Harold Wooster. In his work *Xenology*, Freitas develops the trope of xenobiology by building from a comparative planetology, speculating on the various possible material substrates which might support life and the bodily forms such material conditions may generate. He then uses this speculative analysis as a springboard for formulating a possible typology of some of the forms extraterrestrial intelligence may take.

It remains notable that here too Freitas begins by referencing particular science fiction works where such speculative beings and intelligences appear, only to then extrapolate and contrast the fictional claims with the possibility of such an occurrence based on the scientific knowledge of his time. Making direct reference to the thought of eminent scientists and biologists such as Lynn Margulis, E.O. Wilson, James Lovelock or Carl Sagan, he offers a spectrum of possible cosmic intelligences, as well as their physiology and possible etiology.

As the work progresses, Freitas's methodology rambunctiously melds fact and fiction. In this we can perhaps situate Freitas' xenology as an approach attempting to bridge the 'two cultures' of science fiction with the empirical frame of the natural sciences. Yet it does so through a speculative, abductive method, attempting to propose a most probable spectrum of forms in a situation where there is no empirical possibility for observation: cnsidering that the very subject of xenology – i.e. the extraterrestrial figure – is missing, the space for speculation is wide, but also potentially off the mark in plausibility. Xenology thus works as an abductive science through the frame of speculative probability rather than towards any certainty of 'truth' about the assumed, unidentified concept of ETs.

Artificiality and construction are in this sense implicit in such an endeavor, both as a proposal for the construction of speculative conceptual tools (as in the case of Freitas), as well as in the technoscientific development of actual artificial life forms. And indeed, xenobiology has also recently been proposed as a subfield of the engineering sciences, particularly within the wider field of synthetic biology:

In their paper "Xenobiology: A Journey towards Parallel Life Forms" from 2020, Budisa, Kubyshkin and Schmidt define xenobiology as

> an emergent technoscience that combines advances in genetic engineering with the design of biological systems based on unusual biochemistries delivered by chemical compounds of mostly anthropogenic origin. Xenobiology enables us to create and study strange new life forms, 'aliens', not in the way science fiction books do it, but in terms of enlightened science, design, and engineering.[27]

The authors here assume xenobiology as a synthetic biology and vehemently espouse the design and engineering of new life forms. Dr. Markus Schmidt, one of the authors of the preceding quote, elsewhere proposes xenobiology as a project which ought to strive to create a synthetic memory medium – XNA, or xeno nucleic acids. Its objective would be "to design an orthogonal chromosome different from DNA and RNA," and he assumes XNA to potentially exhibit "a variety of structural chemical changes relative to [these] natural counterparts."[28]

In this call for the technoscientific synthetization of life, contemporary xenobiology has departed the original meaning of Heinlein's xenobiology as a science focused on the chthonic existence of alien life forms, and has rather become adopted as a "technoscience" for their artificial construction. This newly proposed xenobiology purports to leave its speculative frame (which attempted to envision an extraterrestrial physiology) through active presencing of the xeno, becoming an instrumental science within the wider field of synthetic biology.

As a point of interest, we can note that the recent concrete engineering development of "xenobots," i.e. programmed cellular clusters capable of performing various basic tasks,[29] constitutes an example of just such a technoscientific approach in which the building blocks of life are adapted to serve particular needs and purposes.

But perhaps a different understanding of 'synthetics' can be reclaimed here, ones which would understand "syn-thesis" in its fundamental aspect of 'being placed together.'[30] Synthetic politics may then denote a shared becoming which retains connection with sociality beyond the mere workings of technoscience and engineering capital. What might such socio-organic synthetics yield, and to what degree may their very possibility wrest the notion of synthesis away from the progressively privatized economics of the contemporary biomedical complex? Can

such xeno interventions be reclaimed within a social envelope and the common task of making sense?

Such an approach would then tend towards nuanced social engagement and a degree of sensitivity to the shifting, estrangement and queering of biological forms as they present themselves in the contemporary. From asking pragmatic questions about productive sociality, the accessibility of bio-hacking or open-source hormone therapy, to the dissolution of social stigma for racialized or gender minorities – all these are retained as central political issues in the potential project of a synthetic becoming, and provide a ground for formulating and platforming xenobiology as a valid project of the humanities, albeit one which is perhaps not aligned with the best laid plans of academic-entrepreneurial capital. Biopolitics are, first and foremost, a form of *politics*, so the field of xenobiology can be used as a method of negotiating a new political reality.

Despite its thematic nebulosity and being long out of print, Freitas' *Xenology* remains a tantalizing work for scholars and lovers of the speculative poetics which underpin contemporary xenology. It is with Freitas that we see xenology framed as a general science of extraterrestrial life which approaches the mythological, textual and phenomenal existence of extraterrestrial beings in an exhaustive, almost encyclopedic manner. Freitas constructs his xenology as a taxonomical system – from xenopsychology, to xenosociology, to xenobiotechnology... – and on the formal level makes the 'xeno' morpheme become a part-object coupled within numerous taxonomic assemblages. Yet it essentially always indicates the fundamental aspect of non-terrestrial origin.

From the perspective of a positivist scientific discourse, the value of such an exercise is difficult to gauge at best, insofar as the methods of the natural sciences and its empirical method remain here without a proper subject – meaning actual alien life forms. Rather, it speculates them into existence based on certain conditions and human inferences based on previous experience. But despite the bombastic scale at which Freitas formulates his speculations, he generally succeeds in keeping the uncertainty of his claims in view, and nowhere does he explicitly assume that there is conclusive evidence for ETs visiting or interacting with humans and the planet.

Freitas' xenology, however, constitutes only the most recent pre-history to the comparative xenology that is

the subject of this book. His xenology is firmly focused on the speculative study of alien figures and their technologies as formulated by the traditions of western science fiction and the then-contemporary praxis of technoscience. But comparative xenology (CX) rather aims to move beyond this scientistic eclecticism and question the semiotics of the xeno in their particular and observable iterations within the contemporary project of the nascent planetary humanities.[31] CX in this sense aims to study the strange and alien not so much in their virtual, idealized form of the extraterrestrial, but rather in their concrete and contemporary manifestations. From such evidence of difference, alienation, marginalization, and asymmetry, it builds a forensic theory of sociality.

The groundbreaking work of avant-garde artist and theorist Krzysztof Wodiczko, and especially his *Xenology* project of the 1990s, is central in this regard. And it is there that comparative xenology finally finds its proper subject and comes to formulate a theory of planetary synthesis.

1. Harold Wooster, “Xenobiology,” Science (21 July, 1961), 224.
2. Wooster, 223.
3. Robert Heinlein in Harold Wooster, “Xenobiology,” Science (21 July, 1961), 225.
4. Heinlein in Wooster, 225.
5. Robert Heinlein, The Star Beast (Scribner, 1954), 32 [e-pub].
6. Heinlein, 32.
7. Boris and Arkady Strugatsky, Roadside Picnic (Chicago: Chicago Review Press), 122 [e-pub]. Apart from the refreshingly critical tone on account for this meme of Heinlein’s, the Strugatskys nonetheless similarly consider xenology to be a about a psychology of “intelligent beings”.
8. Orson Scott Card, Xenocide (Tor, 2021).
9. Liu Cixin, Dark Forest (Head of Zeus, 2016). In Cixin’s take, there are two axioms to this science: first, that survival is the primary need of civilization, and second, that civilization continuously grows and expands, but the total matter in the universe remains constant. See also Cameron Ballard, “Liu Cixin’s Cosmic Sociology Brings Optimism to Chinese Sci-Fi,” RADII (31 Oct, 2017), accessed 31 May 2022, https://radii.co/article/liu-cixins-cosmic-sociology-brings-optimism-to-chinese-sci-fi. Xenology is also the title of the 2006 novel by Games Workshop publishers, set in the world of Warhammer 40 000, where fantastical civilizations are locked in an intergalactic cosmic war; see Simon Spurrier, Xenology: Notes and Research from the Alien Bestiary of Biegel (Games Workshop, 2006).

The short enumeration lists only explicit mentions of xenology and not the prefix ‘xeno-’ which appears very often in later sci-fi narratives – from Ridley Scott’s “xenomorph” or Octavia Butler’s Xenogenesis trilogy, to Nick Land’s xenosystems – and will be discussed in-depth in the sections focusing on the contemporary use of xeno. See the xenoglossary in Part III – Sightings of this publication.
10. See for example Kim Gordon, “Understanding Speculative Fiction,” mETAphor, no. 3 (2004), 21-27; or Marek Oziewicz, “Speculative Fiction,” Literature (29 March 2017), accessed 23 July 2023, https://web.archive.org/web/20221018080132/https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-78.
11. Robert A. Heinlein, “On the Writing of Speculative Fiction,” in Revista Literária em Traducao (Florianópolis, 2010), 126-131, accessed 23 July 2023, https://archive.org/details/n.t.-revista-nota-do-tradutor-24/page/125/mode/1up.
12. For a good overview of the debate between Margaret Attwood and Ursula K. LeGuin on the propriety of using the label science fiction vs. speculative fiction, see Cecilia Mancuso, “Speculative or Science

Fiction?: As Margaret Attwood shows, there isn't much distinction," The Guardian (10 August 2016), accessed 24 July 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/aug/10/speculative-or-science-fiction-as-margaret-atwood-shows-there-isnt-much-distinction.
13. Robert Freitas official website available at http://www.rfreitas.com/, accessed 24 July 2023.
14. Robert A. Freitas Jr., Xenology: An Introduction to the Scientific Study of Extraterrestrial Life, Intelligence, and Civilization, First Edition (Xenology Research Institute, Sacramento, CA: 1979) accessed 31 May 2022, http://www.xenology.info/Xeno.htm
15. Freitas, Xenology, http://www.xenology.info/Xeno/3.2.2.htm
16. Freitas, Xenology, http://www.xenology.info/Xeno/4.0.htm
17. It is important to note that the contextualization of the discourses of these fields is rather based in their respective natural sciences of archeology and biology. They in that sense question the validity of employing the 'xeno' morpheme as a denotative prefix within the idiom of their own respective fields, much like Heinlein in his time questioned the utility of using the prefixes xeno-, exo- and astro- within the idiom of biology. The discourses are in this sense not properly xenological insofar as they do not primarily study the signification of the xeno as such. The xeno for them continues to reference the speculative matter of the extraterrestrial.
18. Freitas, Xenology, http://www.xenology.info/Xeno/3.1.htm
19. Freitas, Xenology, http://www.xenology.info/Xeno/3.1.htm
20. Works of science-fiction using the trope of discovering ancient architectures or artefacts of alien provenance have since become too numerous to mention, e.g. the works of Philip K. Dick (e.g. Martian Timeslip, A Maze of Death, Valis), Frank Herbert's Dune, the Strugatsky brothers' novels, Michael Crichton's The Sphere, or Ridley Scott's Alien series…
21. Freitas, Xenology, http://www.xenology.info/Xeno/3.1.htm
22. Ben W. McGee, "A call for proactive xenoarchaeological guidelines – Scientific, policy and socio-political considerations," Space Policy, vol. 26, no. 4 (November, 2010), 209-213.
23. Benjamin McGee, LinkedIn, accessed 15 June 2023, https://www.linkedin.com/in/benmcgee/?original_referer=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.benwmcgee.com%2F.
24. Linda Billings, "A call for proactive xenoarchaeological guidelines: A response to Ben McGee" Space Policy, vol. 27 (2011), 53-56.
25. Billings, 54.
26. McGee, 209.
27. Prof. Nediljko Budisa, Dr. Vladimir Kubyshkin, Dr. Markus Schmidt, "Xenobiology: A Journey towards Parallel Life Forms" (2 April, 2020), 2228-2231.
28. Markus Schmidt, "Xenobiology: A new form of life as the ultimate biosafety tool," BioEssays, vol. 32, no. 4 (2010): 322-331.

29. See for example Matt Simons, “Meet Xenobot, an Eerie New Kind of Programmable Organism,” Wired (13 January 2020), https://www.wired.com/story/xenobot/; and Kriegman et al., “A scalable pipeline for designing reconfigurable organisms,” PNAS vol. 117, no. (13 January 2020): 1853-1859.
30. See the collection of essays edited by Lenka Veselá entitled Synthetic Becoming, featuring the thoughts and provocations of Malin Ah-King, Aliens in Green, Adham Faramawy, Eva Hayward, Mary Maggic and others. Here, the lived, manifest experience of co-presence is explored through the prism of art practice and contemporary humanities theory, notably through Science and Technology Studies (STS). See Synthetic Becoming, Lenka Veselá ed. (K. Verlag and FaVU BUT, 2022).
31. Frédéric Neyrat, “Constellations: Planetary Humanities, Fall 2022,” University of Wisconsin-Madison, accessed 21 Sept 2024, https://constellations.ls.wisc.edu/home/the-planetary/.

the xenology of Krzysztof Wodiczko

In 1992, avant-garde artist Krzysztof Wodiczko developed the *Alien Staff*, or *Xenobácul* – the first of his "Immigrant Instruments." The staff was followed by *Mouthpiece* (1993) and *Aegis* (1998). All three projects were part of his long-term project *Xenology: Immigrant Instruments* which Wodiczko was pursuing at the time. It spanned the media of wearable object, theoretical text, and situated performance, and Wodiczko defined *Xenology* as "the art and science of the stranger," "the immigrant's art of survival." The project followed his previous "homeless projections" and "critical vehicles" series.[1]

Xenology's thematics explicitly drew from Wodiczko's own personal experiences – he immigrated from Poland to France and then to Canada in the 1970s, and then to the United States in the 1980s. In formulating his own subjectivity as a "nomad,"[2] Wodiczko drew heavily on the nomad theory of Deleuze and Guattari and the idea of "communicative artifice" of Julia Kristeva,[3] upon which he constructed a series of propositions for the encounters and exchanges between mutual strangers and their environment in an era of mass migration and pervasive globalization.[4] He conceived both the immigrant instruments and the "critical vehicles" before them as "a new kind of 'transitional object'"[5] which may be used in mediating among the hosts and guests within the cultural context of the developing globalism of the 1990s.[6] Wodiczko's work in this sense directly questions the relationship of the postmodern nomad, particularly the immigrant or refugee, and offers technologies as a stand-between object of communication which might facilitate a degree of mutuality not *despite*, but *through* alienation.

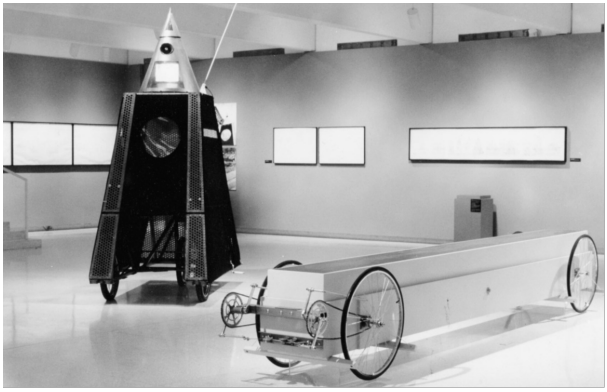
Like the Eleatic Stranger – the *xenos* – of Plato's *The Sophist* dialogue, Wodiczko's xenology frames the figure of a "nomadic Sophist", a "practitioner of democracy" who "recreate[s] an agora or forum each time he or she wishes to speak or listen."[7] From his position as avant-garde maker and theorist, Wodiczko proposes that the development of the stranger is both an "aesthetic" as well as an "ethical and philosophical program."[8] It is in this assertion that xenology extends beyond the speculative mode of Heinlein, Freitas and other sci-fi qua speculative fiction authors before him, and engages with the tangible praxis of communication and semiotics, with the ethically-

driven project of making sense with our planetary others.

It is in Wodiczko's work that xenology ceases to speculate on the nature of the absent alien figures carried by the discourse of science and engineering on the one hand (what Robert Heinlein considered the 'gadgetry' of the sci-fi genre), and rather provides a theory for the alienness of lived, present-day planetary circumstances, environments, and encounters. It is from these that the artist extends a theory of pragmatic and engaged hospitality and a tool-kit for the contemporary stranger.

Wodiczko's preceding work *Critical Vehicles* prefigures some of the concrete outcomes of the *Xenology* project. The "critical vehicles" consisted of wheeled physical objects which "served as a means of enacting (and warning against) the oppressiveness of a psycho-social machine."[9] Wodiczko used these locomotive contraptions to draw attention to the position of the stranger and leverage their aesthetic power to promote and cultivate his ideal democratic regime.

Critical Vehicles
"About," Krzysztof Wodiczko official website



Alluding to the work of Alexis de Tocqueville and his analysis of the caveats of American democracy of the 1830s, Wodiczko writes: "It was only after leaving '70s liberal-autocratic Poland, and with the increasing distance and time and recollection of that experience in the context of Canada, United States, and France, that I truly recognized the Tocquevillian traps in my previous life in Poland."[10] The particular trap Wodiczko speaks of consisted of "life under the illusion or delusion of freedom – the hypocritical life we lead when we take refuge in the machine of a political or cultural system."[11] As Wodiczko sums up: "If democracy is to be a machine of hope, it must retain one strange characteristic – its wheels and cogs will need to be lubricated not with oil but with sand."[12] This sand consists in the agonistic politics of the strange which integrally resonate within the event horizon of the social.

It was against such a backdrop that Wodiczko framed his critical machines, intending to provide a "playful distance" between the user and their surroundings. The critical vehicle is "a medium [...] set to operate as a turning point in collective or singular consciousness."[13] It is 'critical' in the sense that it exercises "judgement" while remaining a concrete, "tactical" tool for creative co-development – both in the physical sense of providing a vehicle of locomotion able to trace alternate connections through the urban space (i.e. bestow a degree of speed and autonomy for the displaced immigrant/ refugee/other), as well as in the metaphorical sense of providing a critical distance from the habituated and entrained choreographies of urban life, or what Wodiczko, following Andrzej Turowski, calls "ideosis – the commonsense life of well-calculated choices for navigating through the system."[14] Such vehicles are active agents insofar as they are made to enact and perform strangeness as an ambivalent force and introduce a degree of noise into the habituated procedurality of urban life.

In its role as a module of the avant-garde, the critical vehicle remains both real and abstract, physical and metaphorical. It exercises a simultaneous tendency to be inconspicuous in the surroundings, while enacting a certain markedness through its flamboyance and bumptiousness. The critical vehicle functions in the service of arrestation and re-appraisal – in its bizarre entry into the habitus, it serves as a vehicle of de-automation and recalibration.

But Wodiczko also makes clear that a critical vehicle doubles as a fetish (i.e. it shows an excess of meaning) and provides only a temporary means for facilitating a particular mode of social interaction. It must eventually be superseded by a more proximate and symmetrical interaction with the people who do not have the dubious privilege of the vehicle: for Wodiczko, the critical vehicle is "a machine that must be abandoned, or rather from which one must step down and continue one's movement on foot."[15] Much like Wodiczko's later *Immigrant Instruments*, the critical vehicles were made to engender a "bizarre" and "magical" effect, intending to fulfill its purpose as a social ice-breaker between the user and their environment, only to eventually be dismantled in favor of more symmetrical and productive interaction.

Both conceptually and historiographically, the theory and practice of critical vehicles constitutes a preliminary setting for Wodiczko's subsequent project *Xenology: Immigrant Instruments*. Both projects are based within an affective regime which tends towards the figural insofar as it works through the dialectic of the self and other within the context of a cosmopolitan urbanity. And although both projects present the figural stranger engaging with other figures via a transitive object (i.e. the critical vehicle or the immigrant instrument), they similarly index the procedural level of the strange, i.e. its architectural frame.

Although Wodiczko's *Critical Vehicles* are vehicles for social interfaciality and affect, they also move through a particular ground. This procedural frame then becomes explicitly theorized by Wodiczko as the "City of Strangers" (discussed below): the nomad, according to Wodiczko, is "not detached" but "must know the characteristics of the terrain well"[16] and must reflect the plasticity of the machinic, procedural environment of "cities that are already fully built"[17] and into which the immigrant arrives.

Wodiczko's work shows the immigrant and refugee as a force which cunningly irrupts into the facade of globalist 1990s culture. The centerpiece of his *Xenology* series are his so-called "immigrant instruments" – the *Alien Staff* (1992), *Mouthpiece* (or *Porte-Parole*, 1995) and the *Aegis* (1998). One can say that it is in *Xenology* that Wodiczko steps down from his earlier "critical vehicle" in order to "continue the journey on foot," and the instruments he brings for such an encounter aim to foster

affective, face-to-face interaction between immigrant and native. Considering xenology as the "immigrant's art of survival,"[18] the set of Immigrant Instruments provides its toolbox:

Alien Staff, or **Xenobácul**[19] – It was composed of two parts: the stick where the user could store documents, photos, etc. in a plexiglass container, and the head which played the user's pre-recorded statements. "As portable performative instruments, imbued with the user's personal experiences, the staff's purpose was to allow immigrants to present themselves and communicate."

Mouthpiece, or **Porte-Parole**[20] – Consisted of a video screen placed over the actual wearer's face which played a pre-recorded message. People involved in the happening donned the equipment and moved through urban space, letting the mouthpiece speak of past trauma and the adversity which an immigrant, or any otherwise marginalized person, might latently carry: "[...] what I was saying was very personal, and my words went deep into people's hearts. I didn't feel comfortable, I felt like I was cutting to the quick. [...] I did this project more for myself than for others,"[21] said 'Nathalie' in 1997 about her experience of carrying the mouthpiece in Trélazé, France.

The Aegis[22] – Named after the protective garment offered by Pallas Athena and Zeus, Wodiczko's Aegis consists of screens mounted on a wing-like structure which is supposed to shield the wearer from "the seemingly simple and well-meaning, but ultimately deeply insulting question 'Where are you from?'."[23] Unlike the previous two immigrant instruments, Aegis "may be freely used by anyone undergoing alienating experiences, not just immigrants."[24]

"Instrumentations," Krzysztof Wodiczko
official website

Wodiczko's immigrant instruments were made to be wielded and worn, making them explicitly figural and implicitly anthropocentric in scale. In the theory carried by his own writings, the instruments were also used for resolving a particular problematic which the stranger / refugee / immigrant might be facing in relation to their interlocutors. They are in this sense "strategically anthropocentric"[25] in that they acknowledge the particular, lived complexities of humans moving through a foreign environment while indexing the wider systemics within which such a figural interaction takes place. They are in this sense not only made for particular people but also for a particular environment with its own dynamics and affords certain types of interaction. The environment for which Wodiczko designed the Immigrant Instruments is the "City of Strangers."

In his 1997 essay "Designing for the City of Strangers," Wodiczko comes with a series of propositions as to why the immigrant instruments are necessary. He explains their pragmatic function as an "object, cliché," a "totem" which ought to facilitate social interaction by inputting a degree of productive noise into the habituated, automated and asymmetrical communication between strangers and "nonstrangers":

> **Proposition 1:** Strangers in their relation to the self and to the nonstranger (as well as to other strangers) need a thing-in-between, an equipment-artifice that will open up discussion and allow them to reveal and to share (communicate) their experiences, identities, visions, and unique strangeness.
> **Proposition 2:** Such equipment (communicative instrument) is an emergency need in today's migratory era, and the first user of the instrument must be the immigrant, followed by other foreigners, and then all those native locals who are so profoundly estranged, infantilized, silenced, and excluded that they resemble the immigrant, even if they do not experience crossing the "proper" geopolitical borders.
> **Proposition 3:** [...] the immigrant instrument must offer healing powers to its users [...] communicating the strangeness with playfulness, confidence, and power. [...]

> **Proposition 4:** The Immigrant Instrument must bring the interlocutor closer to the stranger. To achieve this goal, the Instrument must first take attention away from its user and bring the focus on itself as a "bizarre," "magical," [...] technological gadget or prosthetic device. In the second stage of its operation, the Instrument will expose, at a close distance, the stranger as speech-act virtuoso, who, armed with and empowered by the new media technology and ancient instrumental know-how, will be able to entertain and announce her or his critical and prophetic presence.[26]
> [...]

The propositions above show his method as consisting in the work of negotiating an incremental gradient of strangeness – the immigrant instruments are in this sense transversal media aiming to facilitate intersubjective relations as an exercise in fraught communication. A degree of alienation then constitutes an integral feature of affective communication, and Wodiczko provides occasion for such negotiations by means of his instruments. He reasons that proper "transitive objects," can prompt an exit from the accreted social choreographies and power relations which structure interpersonal interaction and may open them up to new possibilities. Within the particular context of post-Cold War migrations, Wodiczko saw this problem of alienation as a problem of "religious war, new chauvinisms and new nationalisms."[27]

In its preoccupation with the wider social context, particularly the ground of contemporary urbanity, the project fits squarely within the bounds of 1990s Relational Art. Nicolas Bourriaud defined the aesthetics and politics of Relational Art in his 1998 book *Relational Aesthetics* as "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space."[28] The socius and environment are the site of relational art which Wodiczko leverages to speak particularly about the asymmetry of interaction between stranger and "nonstranger."[29] He thus uses performative methods to identify and work through the ambivalence of intersubjective exchange.

It is in this regard interesting to note that Wodiczko bestows onto the marginalized an imaginary, explicitly mythical identity which harbors the promise of being widely legible and understandable on a wide, deeply cultural level. Considering democracy and social interaction as an agonistic endeavor,[30] Wodiczko casts the figure of the immigrant nomad in three different roles – "technician-teacher, prophet and truthteller."[31] Although such archetypal positions may have cultural resonance, they are at the same time general and nebulous enough to provide these ready-made aesthetic and political roles with affective power within a widely planetary context.

Insofar as the cultural connotations of these figures are readable as widely shared archetypes, the regalia of the *Immigrant Instruments* attempt to facilitate a form of intersubjective interaction which may avoid the caveats of personal stereotype based on race, gender or class in favor of a different set of associations – ones which may rework the social bias for the duration of the interaction and engender a different reflection of identity exceeding the frame of then-contemporary identity politics and their oftentimes flattened ontology in favor of a more personal, negotiated, and unexpected formulation of meaning.

Wodiczko's archetypal characters thus also provide a form of compensation for the precarious situation of the immigrant insofar as they attempt to equalize the asymmetry of accommodation through making recourse to the soft power of cultural authority and outsideness: the teacher, the prophet, the sage are also positions of mystical authority which aim to reclaim some of the power of the stranger within a new setting. It is in this sense that his immigrant instruments function as a "communicative artifice" and a fundamental thing-in-between for reclaiming the diversity of social relations.

Yet beyond the figural intersubjectivity, the project also prompts the question of xenia by its indexing of the procedural space within which such an interpersonal dialectic is enacted. Although Wodiczko largely constructs his xenology still as an inter-figural project (in this sense remaining emblematic of a long history of figuralization associated with the concept of *xenos*), his political and aesthetic theory implicitly references the shared context of late 20th century cities of strangers within which such encounters take place and, developing his personal experience of living in various liberal Euro-Atlantic societies, Wodiczko explicitly grounds the meeting between the self

and other within conditions of western urbanity. The relational aspects of the instruments index an inchoate theory of their setting, i.e. the procedural ground on which his restless figures tread and within which their interactions are nested. Wodiczko designed his immigrant instruments explicitly for the "alienated inhabitants of our cities"[32] – firstly for the immigrant, and then for the entire spectrum of alienated individuals which such cities create and support, and it is here that Wodiczko's xenology tends towards a critique of the procedural mode.

In "Designing for the City of Strangers," Wodiczko understands the general typology for the "city" of western urbanity as enacting the dialectic of the "City of Victors" and the "City of the Vanquished." Building on the work of Walter Benjamin, he considers the City of Victors to be a setting and system of power supported by a particular "history of the victors" which "selects events, preserving some and rejecting others, at times determining their interpretation."[33] The victors, in other words, project and make available a particular social relationality by means of curating and filtering certain practices while preventing others. That which had once been new becomes a binding point for the accretion of particular repertoires of action. Through shaping the reality of today the specular, abstract "victors" also determine the degree of affordance and the procedural dispositions which get adopted into the future.

Wodiczko's procedural analysis of this dispositionality of the built environment then strives to be sensitive and responsive to the contingent lived conditions of immigrants, writing that "unlike immigrants of the first wave, these new refugees enter cities that are already fully built, with their architectural, ideological and monumental theaters in place."[34] Urban procedurality here provides a setting whose accreted relations, which have oftentimes become unconscious in their habituated automation and infrastructuralization, determine the modes of the possible for their given urban environment. It is this fixed and overdetermined state of western urbanism shored up by an ideology of the City of Victors which Wodiczko confronts with "the memory of the *nameless*, or the *tradition of the vanquished*"[35] (italics in original) and from which he develops the concept of the "City of the Vanquished."

The city of the vanquished is also a futurological project insofar as the presence and actions of the figural stranger transforms and projects the workings of

the city's procedural environment. Wodiczko writes: "within each immigrant lives an entire city, often richer, more complex, and more hopeful than the public one – the city to come."[36] Much like contemporary anarchist histories indicate that cities of the past were often subject to guided deconstruction, scavenging, destruction, and socially-prompted repurposing,[37] so too does Wodiczko consider the immigrant nomad as a dynamic force with the mandate to imprint their power into the city-as-medium: "It is up to these newcomers, then, to transform and unbuild the cities by inserting their presence, their performances and their histories into the collective memories and democratic discourses of the city itself."[38]

The *Immigrant Instruments* presented by Wodiczko can be seen as media made to facilitate a decolonial ethics within a space which has otherwise been steeped in the imperial ideology of the victor. Wodiczko thus works through the problem presented in Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History", asserting that "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism."[39] The *Immigrant Instruments* in this sense double as speculative futurological instruments for developing a "city to come" which may be more attuned to the present needs and pragmatics of shared and social urban space.

In line with his prerogative of democratic agonism, Wodiczko considers the responsivity to strangers as a fundamental aspect of a properly functioning and benign democracy insofar as their presence delegitimizes a legacy identity and injects a beneficial phenomenology of alienation into the social texture: "Xenology is the art of refusal to be fused, an art of delimitization, deidentification, and disintegration."[40] Although it is easily understood as a maxim for general deconstruction and the disassembly of oppressive power regimes, Wodiczko's xenology must also ask the pragmatic question 'by what means?'

We find a similar notion of systems having a particular responsivity to the input of their users in the language of contemporary speculative architecture. Design theorist Keller Easterling has successfully appropriated and employed the term "affordance," which she defines as the potentialities inherent in a given object and tool contextualized within a particular environment. She also uses the term "disposition," defined as an environment's infrastructural logic hidden to first sight. Through these concepts, Easterling theorizes the relationship of

architectural space and media to the actors which inhabit it. In her book *Medium Design: Knowing How to Work on the World* (2021), Easterling speaks about the "disposition" of a system as a matrix of affordances which similarly "makes some things possible and some things impossible."[41] Certain spaces have particular dispositions which allow for particular affordances to their denizens, and it is Easterling's opinion that those affordances are often wildly divergent from the original plans for whose benefit they were originally developed. Through a logic of exaptation (i.e. the use of an organ in ways which were not its original evolutionary stressors), the dispositions of an architectural space can be repurposed to afford uses which were not originally intended.

By framing xenology around the position of the immigrant nomad within urban space, Wodiczko does two things: he revisits the blind spots of historiography and finds an alternative narrative in the history of the vanquished; and he also uses such a reappraisal as a springboard towards framing a futurological project in which cities are shown to be collaboratively shaped through the input of their (often newly-arrived) denizens/users. Building his artistic project on the backdrop of the critical history of the nomad – particularly the theories of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Julia Kristeva – he uses his art practice to define cities as sites of violent flattening while at the same time seeing them as found objects in need of confrontation with their imperial past in favor of engaged political shaping. Wodiczko's art and theory in this way attempts to open such accreted sites to their alternate, decolonial history and interrogate the irruption of non-normative life worlds which might shape them towards his ideal and properly agonistic democracy.

It is in the parallax view between contemporary design theories and Wodiczko's original work that we can see his approach to city space as a document of its time and idiom. One can say that his work offers a relational aesthetic which favors individualist avant-garde expression over infrastructural analysis and design. In an age where the "city to come" is ever more based around the cybernetic flows and arrestations of technology, the exalted position of the itinerant individual within an urban system whose procedural dimensions everywhere outstrip the scale of the figural person remain an open question. The challenge of comparative xenology then is to work not so much on the level of Relational Art as

Wodiczko had, but rather to assess and shape the deeper level of infrastructure by engaging with it on its own terms, by working at the scale of its procedural reality in developing the particular systemic (rather than merely inter-subjective) dispositions of the shared, lived environment.

After the project *Xenologies: Immigrant Instruments*, Wodiczko developed his work *Dis-Armor* (2000). The work was "directly inspired by the artist's meeting with alienated, sociopathic Japanese youngsters,"[42] and it in this sense expands on Wodiczko's praxis of alienation as proposed in his essay "Designing for the City of Strangers." *Dis-Armor* explicitly moves the question of subjectivity beyond the frame of geopolitically displaced immigrants and towards demographics which are incrementally alienated by other means – "all those native locals who are so profoundly estranged, infantilized, silenced, and excluded that they resemble the immigrant, even if they do not experience crossing the 'proper' geopolitical borders."[43]

"Dis-Armor," Krzysztof Wodiczko
official website

Although not officially part of the *Immigrant Instruments* series, *Dis-Armor* shows continuity in terms of its aesthetics and technics – it is again a wearable technical apparatus made to facilitate communication and the working through of a particular problem, and it also shares with the previous works its xenological aspects: *Dis-Armor* was made to facilitate indirect communication and allow asocial young people to "open up" and ideally resolve their own sense of alienation.

The users of *Dis-Armor* do not make direct eye contact while communicating with others, as the suit's design allows them to have their back turned to their interlocutor and observe the speaker behind them via the head-mounted screens. The "protective suit [...]

combines modern technology with Japanese cultural traditions," and "its overall aesthetic and individual elements were inspired by antique samurai armor"[44] – the suit in that sense functions as a protective layer for the wearer, providing both symbolic and technical defense against the onslaught of contemporaneity.

Here we see the fulfillment of Wodiczko's promise that first the immigrants must be handed tactical instruments of survival, but that such tools expand to aid "anyone undergoing alienating experiences." In this case, it is no longer an instrument for nomadic immigrants but rather asocial young people. This design develops on the assumption of expanding alienation and is indicative of the cultural zeitgeist in which alienation is experienced as a general sensibility, one which is incrementally and intersectionally diverse, while remaining generally and increasingly applicable to the formulation and shaping of contemporary subjectivity. We see Wodiczko's theory tending toward the intersectional logic predicated on an expansive identity politics which sees alienation as a nuanced spectrum of affinity mediated by society and its technologies, rather than the purely intersubjective idiom predicated on an encounter between a self and its other.

I would like to conclude this section on Wodiczko's art and his approach to technics by picking up on his reflections pertaining to Walter Benjamin's conceptualization of *Angelus Novus* and comparing it with the new angel he presents in *Dis-Armor*. Both are witness to the alienating surge of techné, but both approach and mediate such a position differently – where Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* reflects the externalities and fallout of high modernity, *Dis-Armor* works through a similar ethic within the ideational and technological repertoire of late postmodernism.

According to Benjamin, Paul Klee's original painting from 1920 shows

> an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and

> make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.[45]

We can follow the thought of Hito Steyerl who writes that if the Angel of History is indeed looking backwards at the piling ruins of the world, it is in fact us, the viewers observing the painting, who are amid the ruins; who might in fact be the ruins themselves.[46] There is a game of inverted perspective at play here – the Angel looks back at the viewer existing in one's habitual space as much as the viewer looks at him, his gaze always indexing the non-diegetic situation within which the viewer finds herself.

The technical system of *Dis-Armor* constitutes a prosthesis which is brought in as the mediating tool for those persons unable to see anything but the catatonic ruins of contemporaneity. The formal inversion is developed through the prosthetic eyes placed on the wearer's back and the reduction of the interaction's interfaciality. The wearers' gaze is inverted backward, like butterfly camouflage intended to mystify its predator. Through such mutual explicit technological mediation, its function aims to re-establish a degree of communication where before there was only damage. It provides the wearer with a set of technical, new eyes which may provide them with a new discursive position (both metaphorically and factually). It is here that *Dis-Armor* wagers its therapeutic effect.

In formulating the enmeshment of the figural subject with the detritus left behind by history-as-progress, comparative xenology considers *Dis-Armor* as a hint towards the defusing of the scene Benjamin had set up with the *Angelus Novus*. For Benjamin's Angel, purity is situated seemingly outside of history – the dialectic he sets up is that of a pristine being which assumedly exists beyond the bricolaged synthesis of humanity. Beyond its technics and 'progress,' it stands in an Edenic position against the decadence of passing time-as-history. But the technologically mediated inversion of perspective brought about by *Dis-Armor* turns the gaze from retrospective catatonia to a newly formulated and increasingly alienated connection with other beings.

It takes the angel, now a cyborg of circuitry and fleshy organism, from a specular Paradise into the lived world and its planetary conditions.

Xenology here works to unravel the mythical dialectic of profanity and transcendence by means of synthesis – a co-present 'being together' which aims to facilitate communication. Such a project involves the slow and often idiosyncratic tempo of social politics. It also draws on what Wodiczko considers the ideal democratic regime, for which the "sand in the gears" of intersubjective communication is a necessary and integral feature. Politics and technics are in this sense brought in to mediate a problem which must be worked through and healed.

On the question of therapy as a social endeavor, Wodiczko discusses the concept and tool of the "bandage." He regards the bandage as "the oldest and most common reference" to the articulation of xenological design:

> A bandage covers and treats a wound while at the same time exposing its presence. Its presence signifies both the experience of pain and the hope of recovery. [...] Could we invent a bandage that would communicate, interrogate, and articulate the circumstances and the experience of the injury? Could such a transformed bandage address the ills of the outside world as perceived by the wounded? To see the world as seen by the wound![47]

This intimate relationship between the communicational artifice afforded by technics and its capacity for social healing is fundamental for Wodiczko's xenological approach – a bandage communicates a wound to others while providing therapeutic effect to the wounded. It is also assumed to eventually come off; to be, in Wodiczko's words, "abandoned" once the need for its original use disappears. So too do his immigrant instruments and *Dis-Armor* communicate a metaphorical cultural wound, one which is marked by social exclusion, ostracization or precarity. They are made to serve a therapeutic purpose in order to be abandoned in favor of productive synthesis.

That is perhaps what "see[ing] the world as seen by a wound" means – technics are in this regard not so much about an overarching narrative of universal mastery and the pre-destined course of technological innovation and resolve the particular relational issues of suffering, care, and hospitality. Technology for Wodiczko is shaped by

the social sphere first and foremost, its dynamics predicated on the incremental layers of suffering society lets itself perceive and address. It is here that an intersectional theory of xenology finds its field for the first time.

This notion of technics and its relation to the dialectic of particularity vs. universality connects directly to Benjamin's schema of the *Angelus Novus*: where Benjamin sets up technics as a universal and transcendent force, a type of noise which mires the subject's sublime, theic purity, Wodiczko develops a logic of socially engaged, recuperative praxis mediated by technology. Regarding his last xenological instrument, the *Aegis*, Wodizcko makes the connection with Klee's qua Benjamin's Angel explicit:

> There is something like an updated generation of new wings for the angel of history here, the Angel who herself is a vehicle that questions its forward progress, but who can neither afford to, nor wishes to, stop. She moves ahead while critically looking back, [...] scrutinizing her present circumstances while skeptically, if not cynically, projecting the future, in hopes of not finding there the present.[48]

This then is the promise of Wodiczko's xenology project – to use craft and artifice to develop social resolutions which may displace the catatonic ruinology of the present in favor of salvage and proactive, synthetic shaping; one which would see history from the perspective of the ruined and the vanquished but would not be arrested and paralyzed by the sight. Such distance can be achieved through particular forms of productive alienation which Wodiczko's xenology identifies as not necessarily negative, rather seeing them as a social ethics and praxis forming an integral aspect of productive life on our contemporary, alien planet.

1. Krzysztof Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles: Writings, Projects, Interviews (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999), 131.
2. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, xi.
3. Apart from Kristeva's theory of the abject, Wodiczko also develops her call for a "communicative artifice" – a tool which might open language beyond the rigid grid of self and other. Such an artifice can be said to function within the frame of the phenomenology of Emanuel Lévinas and his commitment to the Other, and Wodiczko at places explicitly cites his work.
4. Wodiczko wrote in 1997 that "With the official account of the population of refugees soon to reach 40 million, the United Nations has called the last quarter-century the 'Migration Era'." Wodiczko, 6. Since then, the number of displaced people has only increased: A 2022 UNHCR report states: "By the end of 2021, those displaced by war, violence, persecution, and human rights abuses stood at 89.3 million, up 8 per cent on a year earlier and well over double the figure of 10 years ago […] By May 2022, more than 100 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide by persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order," where the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation constituted a major factor. See UNHCR, "UNHCR: Global displacement hits another record, capping decade-long rising trend" (16 June 2022), accessed 1 June 2023, https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2022/6/62a9d2b04/unhcr-global-displacement-hits-record-capping-decade-long-rising-trend.html.
5. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, 11.
6. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, xi.
7. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, 25.
8. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, 131.
9. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, xii.
10. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, xii.
11. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, xii.
12. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, xiii.
13. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, xvi.
14. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, xii.
15. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, xvii.
16. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, xi.
17. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, 6.
18. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, 131.
19. "Alien Staff: Xenobàcul," Krzysztof Wodiczko's official site, accessed 1 June 2023, https://www.krzysztofwodiczko.com/instrumentation#/alien-staff/.
20. "Porte-Parole Mouthpiece," Krzysztof Wodiczko's official site, accessed 1 June 2023, https://www.krzysztofwodiczko.com/new-gallery-1/1rcnzrlnbduadnw6ml69wiupeckldt.
21. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, 130.
22. "The Aegis Project," MIT's Interrogative Design Group, accessed 1 June 2023, http://web.mit.edu/idg/aegis.html.

23. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, 133.
24. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, 133.
25. Rosi Braidotti, Posthuman Feminism (Cambridge: polity, 2022), 38.
26. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, 13.
27. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, 6.
28. Nicolas Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics (le presses du réel, 2002), 113.
29. Bourriaud's relational aesthetics are more generally an "Aesthetic theory consisting in judging artworks on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt." The figural and interfacial aspect of such media is fundamental, insofar as they produce friction and interaction within the democratic polity (as Wodiczko would ideally have it).
30. Guglielmo Scafirimuto, "Krzysztof Wodiczko's 'Xenological Instruments', an Equipment for a City of Strangers: Urban Spaces and De-Alienation of the Immigrant," Cinergie – Il cinema e le altre arti, no. 14 (2018), 101.
31. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, 133.
32. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, xvi.
33. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, 4.
34. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, 6-7.
35. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, 4.
36. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, 7.
37. David Graeber and David Wengrow, The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity (Penguin Books, 2022), e.g. Chapter 8: Imaginary Cities; or James C. Scott, Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States (Yale University, 2017).
38. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, 7.
39. Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," Simon Fraser University, accessed 1 June 2023, https://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/CONCEPT2.html.
40. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, 131.
41. Keller Easterling, Medium Design: Knowing How to Work on the World (Verso, 2021), ix. The thesis was already approached in Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructural Space (2014).
42. "Dis-Armor," Krzysztof Wodiczko's official site, accessed 1 June 2023, https://www.krzysztofwodiczko.com/instrumentation#/disarmor/.
43. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, 13.
44. Krzysztof Wodiczko, "Dis-Armor."
45. Benjamin, "On the Concept of History."
46. Hito Steyerl, Duty Free Art: Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War (Verso, 2019), 101.
47. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, 10.
48. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, xiv.

xeno in cyberspace

Throughout the late 1980s and into the 1990s, the 'xeno' morpheme was achieving a higher frequency of usage. The xeno was becoming decoupled from its previous framing within the taxonomy of 'xenology' and was acquiring new semantic and formal couplings within a wide swathe of art and culture. One aspect of this moment can best be assessed by studying the parallax between its classical meaning, denoting an irreducible context of social relations, and its hijacking which consists in its attempted decoupling from social significations in favor of their complete evacuation. This decoupling was carried largely by its remediation into the digital culture of the 1990s.[1]

The first, classical approach can be seen in Jacques Derrida's work on hospitality from the mid-1990s, while the second is epitomized by the concurrent cyberpositive philosophy of Nick Land and, to a degree, Sadie Plant, during their involvement with the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU). The CCRU was a para-academic institute tentatively working under the auspices of the University of Warwick. Seen through the prism of the philosophical canon, both strands seem to stand a world apart, yet their contemporaneous construction of the xeno in the 1990s shows a particular moment in its semantic field and indicates a fundamental disagreement pertaining to the xeno which furthermore persists to this day: is the concept of the xeno integrally social, or is it necessary to strip from it the social register in order for it to become xeno?

The fundamental discrepancy between the two idioms is most accessible on the level of social politics: Where Derrida's analysis retains the generally social and latently humanist assumption on the xeno as a persisting problem of social interaction, Nick Land's work from the same era attempts to evacuate social politics from the signification of xeno altogether. Land's abduction of its social signification worked to flatten the integral ambivalence of an ethics of alienation and hospitality in favor of a monolithic techno-ontology;[2] and where Derrida's critique is based in classical literary analysis (with its beholden canons and linguistic deconstruction), Land rather remediates the xeno as a signifier native to the then-nascent virtuality of 'digital space,' inscribing it within a superficially depopulated trope of "cybernetic culture" in which machines are forever poised to outstrip humanity.

Although this particular discussion is not directly commensurate to the entire breadth of comparative xenology (which everywhere exceeds it) it will become clear throughout this chapter that its questions and methods continue to resonate in the discourse on the xeno up until today and prefigure some fundamental flashpoints for the contemporary contextualization of otherness, alienation, hospitality, and planetarity.[3]

At this point in the mid-1990s, Derrida questions the stranger (i.e. *xenos*) in largely classical fashion: approaching the figuration of a stranger as a point of irreducible cultural ambivalence, he makes of them a site of linguistic power. He also assesses and presents the linguistic conditions which interpellate a stranger from the side of a society in the form of the Law. In this sense, he finds the procedural level of accounting for strangeness to be cultural and, as such, mutable and (de)constructable.

His essay "The Foreigner Question" was originally presented as a lecture in 1995, and Derrida briefly engages with Kant's formulation of "conditional" and "unconditional" hospitality.[4] Kant's categorical imperative of hospitality (or what Derrida calls "*The* law of unlimited hospitality"[5]) clashes with "the laws (in the plural), those rights and duties that are always conditioned and conditional" and reliant on processes of "family, civil society and the State."[6] This dialectic is predicated on the tension between the deontological ideal of unlimited hospitality as a transcendent ethical maxim on the one hand, on the other tempered by a particular language of power, legality, and the State. Where the former is based in the ethics of the privileged individual (i.e. the bestower of hospitality who holds the privilege of choice, a type of transcendent actor), the latter is structured around the socially determined morality of the procedural xenia. This tension between the two scales of hospitality constitutes a traditional, if preliminary, matrix for addressing the insistent question of the foreign.

The bivalence of Derrida's post-structural politics here oscillates between the procedural construction of laws and a transcendent, individualist position. In his lecture entitled *Pas d'hospitalité*, Derrida for example plays on the ambivalence between the "step" (French *pas*) towards an act of hospitality and the simultaneous impossibility of such a gesture (*pas* also indicating a negative in French as in 'no' or 'none'). He utilizes the gap between the figure of the stranger (*xenos*) and the social protocol (xenia)

which interpellates them as a fulcrum from which to philosophize the dialectic. Unsurprisingly, he finds such a relationship of host and guest to be based in ambivalence. He, for instance, plays on the Latin cognate of 'xenos' – i.e. host – in his coining of the influential neologism *hostpitality*.[7] This neologism is certainly witty in its melding of 'hospitality' and 'hostility' (as indeed, Derrida explains, both are etymologically related) and also expresses the fundamental ambivalence characterizing the "foreigner question" which, for Derrida, rests on the welcoming of the "the foreigner (*hostis*) [...] as guest or as enemy."[8] Such a dialectic however retains a bivalent logic whose import remains largely linguistic. In it spolitics, it is perhaps the antagonist (in the sense of, for example, Carl Schmitt).

But Derrida's "The Foreigner Question" interestingly also discusses the social register through the work of linguist Émile Benveniste and his theory of enunciations. For Benveniste, any enunciation presumes a context – a social protocol – within which such an enunciation is performed. The relationship between the speech of the figural other and the law of its contextualization sets a linguistic frame within which Derrida then nests his theory of the foreigner. He illustrates this relationship on the example of Socrates' nomad language: He considers Socrates "like a foreigner [...] inept at speaking the language, always risk[ing] being without defense before the law [i.e.] the legal language in which the duty of hospitality is formulated."[9] The relationship between the procedural and the figural is here again replayed in the protocol of legality and the social pact. And this is also the point where Derrida follows the context-based structuralism of Benveniste in his analysis of the social protocol of *xenia*,[10] writing: "Benveniste [...] inscribes the *xenos* in the *xenia*, which is to say in the pact, in the contract or collective alliance."[11] Derrida's theory of the foreigner is formulated at the point of convergence between the figural and procedural modes of the foreign. For him, it is in language that the *xenos*, the "guest-friend," is interpellated as an other by the procedural protocol (xenia) of a polis.[12]

Much like Krzysztof Wodiczko at roughly the same point in time, Derrida questions the foreigner within the figural mode. But where Wodiczko indexed the procedural mode indirectly by focusing on the environment within which such relations occur, Derrida explicitly thematizes the legalist mode of xenia; where Wodiczko's latent

procedural analysis was mostly preoccupied with architecture and urbanism (i.e. the "City of Strangers"), Derrida's procedural analysis of the xeno follows a classically philosophical tangent of language and legality. It is in this regard interesting to note that where Wodiczko, directly prefiguring the later development of comparative xenology, saw the interpellation of the foreigner in the "ultimately deeply insulting question 'Where are you from?'"[13] – meaning an interpellation within a geo-spatial context – Derrida sees it in the interpellation of the question "What is your name?". Derrida:

> The foreigner, then, is someone with whom, to receive him, you begin by asking his name; you enjoin him to state and to guarantee his identity, as you would a witness before a court.[14]

Both Derrida and Wodiczko in this sense straddle the classical boundary between xenos (the figural stranger) and xenia (the procedural protocol of accounting for strangeness by the socius), but where Wodiczko is more interested in the affordances of design and architecture within a globalist context, Derrida remains focused on the affordances of text and power.

Derrida's theory of hospitality as presented in "The Foreigner Question" remains limited by its textual ontology, and although he attempts to move beyond such a frame through the deconstruction of the foreigner (for example asking the contextually cryptic, yet fundamentally intersectional question of "What would a foreign woman be?")[15] his textual approach finds its limits in the works of the materialist turn of the 1990s. It is at a similar moment that feminist writers such a Donna Haraway, Sadie Plant, Sandy Stone, Kimberlé Crenshaw, or Judy Wajcman approach the questions of alienation and alterity within a dislocated understanding, and thus implicate the question of the foreigner within the context of the nascent post-humanities.

The second viewpoint of the proposed parallax between a classical xenology and its remediation in the post-cybernetic landscape is found in the anti-academic philosophy of Nick Land. His much-read and topical essay from 1996 titled "Meltdown" was published within a year of Derrida's Paris lectures (*De l'Hospitalité*, 1997), and the dissonance between them identifies a particular philosophical schism which continues to resonate in contemporary cultural positions on the xeno. Where

Derrida's and Wodiczko's approach grappled with the changing social environment of late-20th century post-modernity, Land's abductive semiotics of the morpheme 'xeno' rather aimed to evacuate the question of social politics and democratic governance altogether, proposing postcybernetic deterritorializations of liberal capital as being poised to overtake the legacy systems of social and state actors.

The position (or rather absence) of sociality in relation to the xeno as originally formulated by Land remains a point of contention to this day. In her essay "Appropriating the Alien: A Critique of Xenofeminism," artist and theorist Annie Goh writes:

> Land's fondness for the 'xeno' prefix is indisputable. Land's 1996 essay 'Meltdown', often cited by his followers, refers to 'xenodata', 'xenosentience' and 'xenogenetics', and his engagements with the far right began on his infamous blog 'Outside In', which was hosted at the address 'xenosystems.net'.[16]

Goh further writes that "Land's xenophobia and his liberal usage of the prefix 'xeno,' particularly since its re-appropriation, has arguably come to overcode the various justifications given for reinvigorating his legacy."[17] But is that really so? Do we accept the hijacking of the xeno as a *fait accompli*, or do we rather reconnect and repurpose its legacy towards more palatable ends?

Over the last decade, the discourse on the xeno has indeed notably moved into art-theory circles in which a body of critique has developed aiming to reclaim an alternate vision of the relationship between technology, society, and alienation. These projects explicitly aimed at reappropriating the xeno from Land's influential conception of so-called 'right-Accelerationism' (R/ACC),[18] to which his work from the 1990s provided an overture. This recent approach aims to resocialize technology and domesticate automation beyond the technological sublime of Land, and within more rigorous philosophical constructs (i.e. left-accelerationism, xenofeminism, or xeno-architecture, discussed in depth in Part II).

Land's essay "Meltdown" sees him using the terms "xenodata", "xenosentience" and "xenogenetics" and implicitly frames an ontological backdrop to the xeno structured around a dense inside / outside split. Such a split posits a transcendent 'outside' as the integral con-

dition of "outsideness," whereas the 'inside' becomes associated with a bureaucratized, academic and cybernetic social sphere of the state. As Land's student and philosopher Iain Hamilton Grant wrote,

> In the last half of the twentieth century, academics talked endlessly about the outside, but no-one went there. Land, by exemplary contrast, made experiments in the unknown unavoidable for a philosophy caught in the abstractive howl of post-political cybernetics.[20]

Lands conception of outsideness prompts a radical rift between the 'inside' of social politics and domesticity, while the transcendent philosophy of the 'outside' is developed along the vector of technology at the service of liberal capital. It in this sense aims to provide a final solution to systemic homeostasis, regarding society as a problem to be resolved and superseded by a politics of "exit."[21]

As writes publisher and philosopher Robyn Mackay,

> Land courted the 'outside' of philosophy, combining it with other disciplines—from nanotechnology to occultism, from computation to anthropology. But he sought the 'outside' in a more radical sense, for this interdisciplinary exploration was undertaken in view of one sole aim: to escape the anthropic conservatism of 'philosophical thought.'[22]

The flattening of social relations and their folding within the technological envelope is particularly palpable in Land's vision of "teleoplexy," which he defines as a process of "(self-reinforcing) cybernetic intensification" which constitutes a counterforce to the drag of humanism and its conservative politics; it is "the wave-length of machines, escaping in the direction of extreme ultra-violet, among the cosmic rays."[23] Machines are here understood as becoming a transcendent force which self-assembles into the cosmos, an inhuman nomos which provisorily poses as logos in order to overcome its original biological medium (i.e. the human) in favor of smooth algorithmic governance. The dialectic of teleoplexy is in this regard posited as a constant struggle between forces of a deterritorializing totality equated with artificial super-intelligence and capitalist technics, positioned

to overwrite the reterritorializing inertia of conservative humanism peddled by academia and other "security systems."

Importantly for the formulation of comparative xenology, it must be noted that Land's vision remained not so much post-human and planetary, but rather simply anti-social. Land's politics tended more towards transhumanist eugenics and a celebration of the mechanicity of capitalism, and his philosophy posits a malign futurism lauded as the line of flight from the "anthropic conservatism of 'philosophical thought.'" Land finds himself hemmed in by a sublime and imaginary ontology of technology which shows a particularly salient fetish for logic of machines which "comes from the future"[24] and considers the human an outdated medium, to be replaced by machines – but not those of "of loving grace,"[25] but by self-structuring and self-replicating phantoms of imperial ambition. As the subtitle to his former Twitter account reads, "Coldness, be my God."[26] It is the contention of comparative xenology that this development constitutes a form of hijacking and replaces the complex and difficult work of social politics with a flattened technocratic imaginarium, one which is posited as a *fait accompli*.[27]

It is worth noting that Land's vision of run-away technics has in many ways prefigured more robust discourse on the (mis)alignment between the aims of humanity and technics, as well as the potential of a run-away AI, a trope which has become an important theme for people like Stephen Hawking, Nick Bostrom, Ray Kurzweil, Max Tegmark, or Elon Musk.[28] Land's politics have also undoubtedly found resonance, for example, in the eugenic project of the American alt-right and neo-reactionary discourse, and continue to cast a long shadow in contemporary debate in spheres quite outside of their original para-academic context. Land's occasionally toxic online proclamations over the last two decades have furthermore often stirred debate and, since the gradual dissolution of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit, Land's work has become ever more problematic in its political implications, oftentimes viciously peddling a generally Neo-reactionary philosophy or explicitly eugenic racial politics.[29] Nonetheless, his conceptualization of the morpheme 'xeno' has remained highly influential and, despite its problematic legacy, has become part of the DNA of contemporary xenology and must, at least provisorily, be addressed on such a footing.

Some of the theory on the xeno in the post-2010s then aims to directly reappropriate and wrest it from Land's transcendent visions of the technological sublime and his attempts at reducing its grounding in social relations. In the works of thinkers such as Armen Avanessian, the Laboria Cuboniks work group, Helen Hester, Luciana Parisi or Reza Negarestani, the deterritorialized xeno of the 1990s becomes a lynchpin from which the xeno of contemporary sociality is developed, and it is these projects which come to constitute the object of comparative xenology discussed in Part II of this book.

Many projects of such a discourse use the 'xeno' morpheme in novel ways, and where the xeno as developed by Land loses its initial emancipatory potential and develops into the nihilist politics of right-accelerationism,[30] the works of the recent decade questioning the contemporary xeno develop a different frame for addressing the question of the xeno as an integrally xeno-*political* project.

Both Derrida's textual *cul de sac* and Land's fetish for smooth technological space thus find themselves outphased by variously robust social theories which reground and reclaim the xeno in its original social connotations. It is these approaches which are the focus of the next chapter.

1. It must also be noted that the 'xeno' morpheme was also being consistently used at this time for various medical procedures and concepts, most notably "xenotransplantation" (i.e. the transfer of animal tissue into the human body) or in "xenohormones" (such as "xenoestrogens" or other endocrine disruptors increasingly present in our environment).
2. Jiří Sirůček, Neklidné Hranice: Posthumanistická planetární (po)etika (Display, 2022), 21.
3. See chapter 2.1. for the discussion between Annie Goh and Jules Joanne Gleeson on the connotations of the xeno today, specifically in relation to the work of Nick Land and xenofeminism.
4. Derrida, On Hospitality, 77.
5. Derrida, On Hospitality, 77.
6. Derrida, On Hospitality, 77.
7. Derrida, On Hospitality, 45.
8. Derrida, On Hospitality, 45.
9. Derrida, On Hospitality, 15.
10. It is telling that Derrida classically ascribes such a protocol to the "law", whereas the "cyberoptimist" theories of the 1990s attempt to avoid such a caveat in favor of a deterritorialized and liberal protocol of technology, one which stands apart from the drag of social politics and their legacy structures. Such a cyberoptimist perspective will be discussed on the example of Nick Land and the Cyberentic Culture Research Unit in subsequent sections.
11. Derrida, On Hospitality, 29.
12. Figurality is a classical trope in xenology, as well as in the ethical phenomenology of Martin Buber or Emmanuel Lévinas.
13. Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles, 133.
14. Derrida, On Hospitality, 27.
15. Derrida, On Hospitality, 73.
16. Annie Goh, "Appropriating the Alien: A Critique of Xenofeminism," Mute (29 July 2019), accessed 1 June 2023, https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/appropriating-alien-critique-xenofeminism. It is also perhaps worth noting that Nick Land's Twitter / X account founded in October 2023 is "Xenocosmography."
17. Goh, "Appropriating the Alien."
18. Benjamin Noys, Malign Velocities: Accelerationism and Capitalism (Zer0 Books, 2014).
19. Nick Land, Outside In blog (Wayback Machine), accessed 2 June 2023, https://web.archive.org/web/20180213122613/http://www.xenosystems.net/.
20. Robin Mackay, "Nick Land: An Experiment in Inhumanism," Robin Mackay's blog, accessed 2 June 2023, http://readthis.wtf/writing/nick-land-an-experiment-in-inhumanism/.
21. Nick Land, The Dark Enlightenment (December 2012), accessed 2 June 2023, https://www.thedarkenlightenment.com/the-dark-enlightenment-by-nick-land/. As a general statement, we can say that

this work follows a political theory which regards society as indeed a pressing problem, but not one to be repressed, but rather resolved time and time again.
22. Mackay, “Nick Land: An Experiment in Inhumanism.”
23. Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, #Accelerate: the Accelerationist Reader (Padstow: Urbanomic, 2014), 514.
24. Land, Fanged Noumena, 338.
25. The phrase originally comes from Richard Brautigan’s 1967 poem “All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace,” but was recently used in the analysis by John Markoff, Machines of Loving Grace: The Quest for Common Ground between Humans and Robots (Ecco, 2016).
26. Nick Land’s Twitter, @Outsideness.
27. Land’s well-known claim is that “Neo-China arrives from the future;” Nick Land, “Meltdown,” Fanged Noumena, 442.
28. See for example Rory Cellan-Jones, “Stephen Hawking warns artificial intelligence could end mankind,” BBC Tech (2 December 2014), https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-30290540; Nick Bostrom, Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies (Oxford University Press, 2014); Max Tegmark, Life 3.0: Being Human in the Age of Artificial Intelligence (Penguin Books, 2018); Ray Kurzweil, The Singularity Is Near (Viking, 2005).
29. Nick Land’s Twitter presence @Outsideness quips edgy, oftentimes explicitly toxic tweets pertaining to racial politics, woke culture, progressivism, and reactionary philosophy. For a good analysis, see Robert Topinka, “‘Back to a Past that Was Futuristic’: The Alt-Right and the uncanny form of racism.” b2o: an online journal, Birkbeck College (2019).
30. Benjamin Noys, Malign Velocities.

The original founder and force behind the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU) was theorist Sadie Plant, who in 1995 proposed the Unit as a module which would explore the overlaps of feminism and cybernetics under the auspices of Warwick University Department of Philosophy. After Plant left academia soon thereafter, Nick Land took over the directorship and forked from Plant's original vision.[1] But before this departure, Plant and Land co-authored the seminal essay "Cyberpositive" (1994) in which they together explore the potentialities of digital culture and digital technology upon the backdrop of cybernetic theory.

"Cyberpositive" remains the only published co/authored text of Sadie Plant and Nick Land and provides a stark exposition of the western zeitgeist for the digital 1990s, a point when private capital and the increasing distribution of cybernetic technologies were developing into a pervasive and widely distributed culture. The optimism generated by the perceived liberalization and deterritorialization of information exchange and its promise for the libidinal economies of the post-Cold War West also became a hot topic for the then-contemporary western anglophone philosophy, with the para-academic CCRU being one of the most exuberant projects working the post-cybernetic landscape.

Being written before the first "dot-com" crash and the beginnings of the reterritorialization of the internet at the hands of various sector-specific monopolies and state actors, "Cyberpositive" communicates the optimism of a terra nova of cybernetic 'space' which opened up with the new affordances of the then-nascent digital technologies. Simon Reynolds considers the text "a gauntlet thrown down at the Left-wing orthodoxies that still dominate British academia,"[2] writing that

> The term 'cyberpositive' was a twist on Norbert Wiener's ideas of 'negative feedback' (homeostasis), and 'positive feedback' (runaway tendencies, vicious circles). Where the conservative Wiener valorized 'negative feedback', Plant/Land re-positivized positive feedback – specifically, the tendency of market forces to generate disorder and destabilise control structures.[3]

To remain a while longer with the work of Nick Land, we may see the explicit valorization of positive feedback within cybernetic culture in his later formulation of "accelerationism," which has continued to bear influence on the philosophy and political theory of the first decades of the 21st century. Land finds a central principle for his accelerationist celebration of positive feedback and emancipatory breakdown in a passage from Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), where the authors write:

> For perhaps the [libidinal] flows are not yet deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough, from the viewpoint of a theory and a practice of a highly schizophrenic character. Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to "accelerate the process," as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is that we haven't seen anything yet.[4]

In Land's cyber theory, this call to "accelerate the process" is analogous to Deleuze's call to deterritorialize libidinal flows, but is here remediated for the digital era, finding its medium in the nascent infrastructures of digital capitalism. Land in this regard philosophizes a rift between legacy state systems (predicated on a homeostatic tendency towards "security" and negative feedback) and the liberal promise of postcybernetic entrepreneurship (that is the cyberpositive forces of 1990s digital capital).[5] His work during and after heading the CCRU updates the maxim of positive feedback as a categorical imperative for liberalism, one which overwrites the state and polis in favor of what can be termed a 'machinic technocracy,' or what has, in recent years, been described as the pervasive political threat of an exacerbated "technofeudalism."[6] It remains blatantly paradoxical that the technological deterritorialization which Land courted in his early work in fact becomes incrementally outed as a force of reterritorialization at the hands of various security-driven hegemons; a "Neo-China arriv[ing] from the future," as he writes in his text "Meltdown."[7]

Land spends much of the 1990s and onward envisioning a world of accelerating positive feedback which, in our current era of run-away climate change, digital capital and social migration, was partly undoubtedly prescient, but Land has also more recently become the herald of a neo-reactionary, technocratic determinism. We see this, for example, in his series of posts called *The Dark Enligh-*

enment (2012), where he critiques modernity and shows a dislike for democracy. The work has directly influenced the wider Neo-Reactionary movement and its corporate-fascist politics.[8]

Sadie Plant's approach and frame of philosophical reference was, however, significantly different from that of Land. In the years leading up to and since the CCRU's original founding, Plant was instrumental in the framing of cyberfeminism, originally proposing the CCRU as a collective for studying the relations between cybernetic culture and feminism. This is a central point of divergence between the two thinkers, one which gives insight into the position of the xeno as it was formed under the auspices of the CCRU, and which undoubtedly constitutes one of the fundamental sources for the semantics and grammatology of the xeno today.

Following cultural theorist Jules Joanne Gleeson, we can say that "CCRU collaborator Sadie Plant [...] (unlike Land) remains widely respected in cultural theory."[9] This statement in itself merits a reappraisal of "Cyberpositive," one of the earliest texts of the CCRU (originally formulated in 1992)[10] and co-authored by the two heads of the CCRU hydra. For the particular purposes of comparative xenology, I would like to focus on a brief passage which comes to prefigure some of the later approaches to the questions of terrestriality and alienation within the philosophy of posthumanism (particularly as expressed in the work of the xenofeminist Laboria Cuboniks collective). Land and Plant write:

> Security cybernetics has supplanted the critique of alienation, the great motif of humanist economics, which had long become an increasingly futile search for the source of corporate control. Alienation used to diagnose the condition of a population becoming foreign to itself, offering a prognosis that still promised recovery. All that is over. We are all foreigners now, no longer alienated but alien, merely duped into crumbling allegiance with entropic traditions.
>
> To what could we wish to return? Heidegger completed the degeneration of authenticity into xenocidal neurosis. Being died in the fuhrer-bunker, and purity belongs entirely to the cops. The capitalist metropolis is mutating beyond all

> nostalgia. If the schizoid children of modernity are alienated, it is not as survivors from a pastoral past, but as explorers of an impending post-humanity.[11]

Plant and Land are philosophizing a moment which is directly analogous to the shift in the signification of the xeno from its classical framings towards the post-cybernetic condition of cyberpositivity. In navigating the line of flight of digital capital, they identify their contemporary situation as one of crisis brought about by social, technical and epistemic acceleration and transformation, and identify alienation as the central vector which moves traditional philosophies of Being to those of becoming, exploding as the zeitgeist of the postcybernetic era. the gradual dismantling of the modernist subject and the impossibility of its "return," Land and Plant offer a "cyberpositive" project in its place, one which might become liberated from the forces of security and their "xenocidal neurosis."

Martin Heidegger famously considered cybernetization as a fundamental cause in the proclaimed "end of philosophy;" a new epistemology which comes to overwrite the classical vocabularies of phenomenology and metaphysics in favor of the technical and procedural cooptation of 'thinking' as such.[12] For Land and Plant, Heidegger's philosophy of technics "completed the degeneration of authenticity," which structures the 'human security system' as a keeper of order and purity. Against this classical and conservative tradition of philosophical thought, which is for them based in ressentiment, Land and Plant posit the liberal forces of a postcybernetic sensibility predicated on positive feedback. They celebrate the acceleration beyond the mandate of control-based state systems and philosophize their escape velocity, potential lines of flight, and their impact on formulating the future.

"Cyberpositive" has, along with much of the subsequent work of the CCRU, provided a conception of exit from cultural and philosophical inertia, exploring the "impending post-humanity" within a postcybernetic context. And although both writers have since developed their thought in vastly different directions, "Cyberpositítve" sheds light on the original state of cyber-philosophy as practiced by the CCRU in the early 1990s.

The resonances with Land's later accelerationism are palpable and retrospectively situate accelerationism not so much as a critical gesture (commonly assumed to

consist in "accelerating capitalism to its destruction"[13]) but rather as a hysterical response to the problem of the corroding and dissipating self-image of the human as mediated via a newly minted techno-economic sector. But where Land's cyberpositivity adopted a largely explicit anti-humanist position, Plant's stake in cyberpositivity rather opened the philosophical margins to a posthumanism growing out of social and materialist theory and practice. Plant's work prefigures a philosophical vector which has come to engage with a vast segment of contemporary thought (i.e. cyberfeminism, new materialism, social feminism, contemporary Science and Technology studies) and her approach to cybernetics in this sense constitutes an "exit through the deep" (Land) of its own. Such an 'exit' is one which does not fetishize a transcendent outsideness beyond the mandate of social ethics. It rather embraces construction as an integral component of social relations and their material conditions constitute. It in this sense engages with the emergent and hisotorically contingent palimpsest of traces which manifestly structure the contemporary situation.[14]

Such a gesture thus exceeds theories focusing on the technocratic systems of 'societies of control,' which right-accelerationism has since come to perversely critique from the inside, and rather develops postcybernetic thought towards the plane of 'planetarity' in which the planetary situation is constructed as a site of integral sociality (discussed at length in Part II, particularly in relation to xenoplanetarity).

The planetary connection between material existence and the integral sociality of both bios and human culture is for example proposed in the opening of Plant's *Zeroes + Ones: Digital Women + The New Technoculture*[15] first published in 1997, where Plant gives an account of the first bacteria which appeared in the Devonian[16] period of Earth's history.

> Those were the days, when we were all at sea. It seems like yesterday to me. Species, sex, race, class: in those days none of this meant anything at all. No parents, no children, just ourselves, strings of inseparable sisters, warm and wet, indistinguishable one from the other, gloriously indiscriminate, promiscuous and fused. No generations. No future, no past. An endless geographic plane of micromeshing pulsing quanta, limitless webs of interacting blendings,

> leakings, mergings, weaving through ourselves, running rings around each other, heedless, needless, aimless, careless, thoughtless, amok.[17]

The above quote expresses a poetic core of Plant's approach to otherness, being at the same time aesthetic, feminist, materialist and xenophilic. In other words, it does not hijack the xeno away from its fundamentally biological and social register towards a paranoid transcendentalism, but rather expands it for a posthuman politics which remains tuned to the biotic existence of the planet. Such a synthetic politics of mutual becoming are constructed not as a liberal and individualist project, i.e. as a 'technology of the self' commensurate with capitalist entrainment, but rather as a synthesis, that is a "being placed together" in the becoming-with of planetary-social relations.[18] Plant's cyberpositive attitude understood the new cyberspace as a space of connectivity, homogeneity and universality, and Plant saw cybernetic culture as similarly connectionist, non-hierarchical and responsive – "An endless geographic plane of micromeshing pulsing quanta, limitless webs of interacting blendings, leakings, mergings."

In 1997, Sadie Plant left the University of Warwick and Nick Land took over the directorship of the CCRU. This was also the year that her work *Zeroes + Ones* was published and has since become one of the seminal texts for the construction of cyberfeminism. In exuberant prose, the book documented the legacy of women in cybernetics and programming, from Ada Lovelace to the operators of the ENIAC computer,[19] and explored forgotten or disregarded material histories through a deft speculative lens. The contemporary press lauded it as "a brilliant and terrifically sustained cyberfeminist rant" and "the best and most original book on the history and implications of ubiquitous computation."[20]

It is notable that Plant's book also references the work of American science fiction writer Octavia Butler, particularly her *Xenogenesis* trilogy.[21] And indeed, Butler has become a central literary source for subsequent feminist critiques of technology and speculative sociology. Butler's later work (i.e. the *Xenogenesis* trilogy and the incomplete *Earthseed* trilogy) have come to be regarded as central sources for the theorization of the xeno,[22] particularly for theorists and artists such as Diann Bauer, Patricia Reed, Luciana Parisi, Antonia Majaca or Armen Avanessian.[23]

The *Xenogenesis* trilogy, since published under the title *Lilith's Brood*, follows the fate of Lilith, a human woman abducted by the Oankali, who are an ambivalently benign, space-faring civilization of extraterrestrials. The Oankali are able to store and graft genetic code from myriad cosmic species, with genetic information being a medium which they have learned to store, manipulate, and gestate across the cosmos. The race happens to find the human capacity for mutation, particularly its cancerous growth, a tremendous evolutionary force, and one they plan to harness. The plot of the *Xenogenesis* trilogy indexes a fascinating matrix of cosmic horror and "origin story,"[24] navigating questions of strangeness and alienation through a speculative narrative exploring xenobiology, hybridity, and kinship.[25] Evolutionary bio-hacking constitutes one of its fundamental tropes, and the plot essentially casts *zoe* (i.e. the biological substrate of all living matter) as a technological stratum sustaining all sectors of the alien Oankali civilization, from sex and reproduction,[26] to ship-building and architecture.

The turn toward the planetary scale and the particular need to make Earth a livable site is symptomatic of the posthuman turn in Butler's work. Here, the xeno engages not only with the figural strangeness of the figural *xenos* as a classic sci-fi trope of otherness and xenotic kinship (i.e. the Oankali bodies which, through advanced breeding practices, change the gene pool of their cosmic others),[27] but expands the figural tropes for the procedural layer in navigating kinship protocols which span the inhuman envelope of the planet and the wider cosmos.

In its excavation and working through of the material damage and debris of the planet, Butler's work formulates a type of cosmic fragility and precarity. Yet this perspective differs from that of the paranoiac mindset – for her, the existence of life is integrally adaptable, synthetic and contingent, and she builds her implicit philosophy from such a socially engaged ground. Butler's work has in this regard been influential in developing the question of the xeno not only within its classical figural/procedural split (i.e. the classical modes of the xeno as expressed in *xenos* and *xenia*), but in a speculative approach to inhuman rationality. She navigates questions of mutation and bio-hacking within the context of a planetary-scale trace theory, yet never loses sight of the focalizing presence of the social conditions of the lived experience. It is in this way that the xeno expands towards an explicitly posthuman register,

insofar as it engages with the material bios of the planet while (in true literary fashion) retaining humanity as an irreducible vantage point. This pressing insistence on the relevancy of its life and its mutual enmeshment in complex interactions, stretching through the inhuman temporality of geological and cosmic time, can be said to adopt the position of a strategic anthropocentrism, but one which moves beyond the signifier of the human in favor of expanding sociality beyond the marks of race and species, expanding into the cosmos. The position of humanity is thus made malleable and open to reconsideration – it becomes more than an early-modern, enlightened trope in need of erasure, but rather one which must be engaged in constant and progressive revision without losing sight of its own strategic relevancies (see the chapter **on the inhuman** in Part II).

This is commensurate with a significant sidestep from cyberpositivity. Where the xeno of cyberpositivity is predicated on lines of flight towards an intimated transcendent signifier (whether as runaway techné, or as the nativist, fascist imaginarium), Butler's and Plant's thematization of reproduction beyond an androcentric register tends towards a xeno commensurate with a conservative progressivism which reclaims the vision of social politics as an originary and (inter)planetary condition. For both Plant and Butler, humanity serves as a departure point providing a view onto the posthuman landscape – one which is not de-peopled by the machines of acceleration, but rather integrally oriented towards an expansive conception of society as a shared mechanism of biological resilience and survival in which competition and collaboration, hospitality and hostility, predation and symbiosis, commensalism and indifference are always in intimate proximity and co-generative of shared realities, indicating the integral robustness and relevance of the social sphere.

Although the xeno skirts the line of accelerationism as a historical vestige, this short foray into the contemporary situation of its abduction shows it as continually viable into the future. The xeno can in this sense be employed to constitute a social core existing beyond the paranoid "ehtnostates" of "patchworks" of the neo-reactionary (NRx) imaginaries, in favor of navigating the shared alienation the contemporary (more-than-)human subjects.

The map is not the territory.

1. 'Officially' the "CCRU didn't ever exist" but nevertheless directly influenced many respected thinkers and theorists such as Mark Fisher, Anna Greenspan, Kodwo Eshun, Robyn Mackay, Ray Brassier, or Reza Negarestani. See Simon Reynolds, "RENEGADE ACADEMIA: The Cybernetic Culture Research Unit," Simon Reynolds' blog (November 3, 2009), accessed 8 July 2023, https://energyflashbysimonreynolds.blogspot.com/2009/11/renegade-academia-cybernetic-culture.html.
2. Reynolds, "RENEGADE ACADEMIA."
3. Reynolds, "RENEGADE ACADEMIA."
4. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus (Bloomsbury, 2012), 276.
5. Land in this sense prefigures the topical discussion of the relationship and mandate of state actors in relation to large players of techno-capital (like MAGMA, i.e. Microsoft, Amazon, Google, Meta, Apple) which have adopted the model of what Nick Srnicek has called "platform capitalism," and which Shoshana Zuboff has associated with "surveillance capitalism." See Nick Srnicek, Platform Capitalism (polity, 2017); Shoshana Zuboff, Surveillance Capitalism (Great Britain: Profile Books, 2019).
6. "Trump ally Steve Bannon blasts Elon Musk as 'truly evil' in MAGA split," Al Jazeera (13 January 2025), accessed 20 April 2025, https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2025/1/13/trump-ally-steve-bannon-blasts-elon-musk-as-truly-evil-in-maga-split; Yannis Varoufakis, Technofeudalism: What Killed Capitalism (Melville House, 2024).
7. Nick Land, "Meltdown," Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987–2007 (Urbanomic, 2012).
8. In the sphere of philosophy, contemporary neoreactionary (NRx) thought has been seminally shaped by the work of Curtis Yarvin, aka Mencius Moldbug, and his blog Unqualified Reservations (2007–2013) and Gray Mirror (2020–). Land's The Dark Enlightenment was inspired notably by Moldbug's "Open Letter to Open-Minded Progressives" (2008)
9. Jules Joanne Gleeson, "Breakthroughs and Bait: On Xenofeminism and Alienation," Mute (19 October 2019), https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/breakthroughs-bait-xenofeminism-alienation.
10. Reynolds, "RENEGADE ACADEMIA."
11. Nick Land, Sadie Plant, "Cyberpositive," #Accelerationist Reader, 306
12. Martin Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," On Time and Being (University of Chicago Press, 2002).
13. Such a view has been discussed and critiqued by, for example, Slavoj Žižek in "Slavoj Zizek on Accelerationism," Not Actually channel, Youtube, published 31 March 2019, accessed 4 June 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=432g97vs6s0; or Steven Shaviro in the chapter "Introduction to Accelerationism" in No Speed Limit: Three Essays on Accelerationism (University of Minnesota Press, 2015), available online at https://manifold.umn.edu/projects/no-speed-limit, accessed 4 June 2023.

14. The question of a posthuman grammatology is wonderfully explored in Laurent Milesi's three-part series "Derrida and Posthumanism" (Part I: From Sign to trace, Part II: The Animality of the Trace, Part III: The Technicity of the Trace), see Laurent Milesi, "Derrida and Posthumanism," Critical Posthumanism (2020), accessed 4 June 2023, https://criticalposthumanism.net/author/laurent-milesi/.
15. Sadie Plant, Zeroes + Ones: Digital Women and the New Technoculture (London: Fourth Estate, 1997)
16. Or, by other accounts, Pre-Cambrian era, see 'Bacteria,' Encyclopedia Brittanica, accessed 4 June 2023, https://www.britannica.com/science/bacteria/Evolution-of-bacteria.
17. Sadie Plant, Zeroes + Ones, 7 [e-pub].
18. Vít Bohal, "Synthetic Becoming: Life in the Molecular Commons," Makery (1 March 2023), accessed 4 June 2023, https://www.makery.info/en/2023/03/01/english-synthetic-becoming-life-in-the-molecular-commons/; Lenka Veselá, ed., Synthetic Becoming (Litomyšl: K. Verlag and Brno FaVU, 2022).
19. Plant for example provides one of the most influential accounts of the role Lady Ada Lovelace played in drafting the program made for Charles Babbage's Analytical Engine, finding the first programming technology in the technology of the Jacquard loom. Such accounts have become canonical for the study of 'cyberfeminism,' a term which Sadie Plant coined and developed (along with other artists and thinkers such as VNS Matrix collective, Judy Wajcman, or the Old Boys Network).
20. "A Loom with A View," Irish Times (9 October 1997), accessed 4 June 2023, https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/a-loom-with-a-view-1.113972.
21. Plant, Zeroes + Ones, 220.
22. Butler's work is referenced for example in Luciana Parisi's concept of "xenopatterning," or what she calls "alien image-models" which compute futurological patterns by making recourse to abductive logic and by embracing speculation as a non-deterministic vector for constructing the future. Similarly, the members of the Laboria Cuboniks xenofeminist collective consider Butler's use of the 'xeno' morpheme to be a fundamental source for the 'xeno-' of xenofeminism. See Robert Barry, "Doing Gender: Helen Hester on Xenofeminism," interview, The Quietus (31 March 2018), accessed 4 June 2023, https://thequietus.com/articles/24298-xenofeminism-helen-hester-interview.
23. See for example Diann Bauer, Xenogenesis, Treignac Project, exhibition (Treignac: 3 June – 16 July 2017), accessed 4 June 2023, https://treignacprojet.org/exhibitions/xenogenesis/; Luciana Parisi, "Xeno-patterning: Predictive Intuition and Automated Imagination," Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities, vol. 24, no. 1 (2019), 81-97; Antonia Majaca and Luciana Parisi, "The Incomputable and Instrumental Possibility," e-flux, no. 77 (November 2016), accessed 4 June, 2023, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/77/76322/the-incomputable-and-instrumental-possibility/.

24. Cathy Peppers, “Dialogic Origins and Alien Identities in Butler's Xenogenesis,” Science Fiction Studies, vol. 22, no. 1 (March 1995), 47-62.
25. But the need to feed living systems here also indexes the wider planetary scale, as the ETs ultimately aim to consume the entire Earth in order to draw bio-fuel for their further cosmic wanderings, as they had always done in the past. In the series’ third book, Imago, this plan is disrupted through the actions of Jodahs, who sci-fi theorist John Folk-Williams believes to be a conduit for a new way of life which enables “the seeds of new settlements to take root in the earth so that the planet can thrive in a new way.” [John Folk-Williams, “Octavia E. Butler’s Xenogenesis Trilogy: A New Species Emerges,” SciFi Mind (last update 2023), accessed 4 June 2023, https://www.scifimind.com/octavia-e-butlers-xenogenesis-trilogy-new-species/.] Jodahs is developed as a strange messiah who opens the path for a new species of human, one which would be able to avoid the caveats of the drive to destruction which led to the original nuclear disaster which had destroyed the Earth before the Oankali arrived.
26. A similar preoccupation with abject, hybrid couplings also comes across in her other work, notably the acclaimed 1984 short story “Bloodchild”.
27. For example, in the marked resistance of human males to the blissful fusion with an alien starfish-being during coitus, or the transgenerational narrative which sees humans grappling with the hybridity and alien nature of their offspring. This trope of uncanny offspring was already seen in the Strugatsky Brothers’ Roadside Picnic where the relationship of ‘Monkey,’ Burbdridge’s mutant daughter, is a brief but seminal trope, also later picked up on in Andrei Tarkovsky’s rendition of Stalker. For a reflection on this theme as an explicitly feminist trope see: Renata Lis, “The Stalker’s Daughter: Tarkovsky’s Women,” PrzeKrój, 30 May 2020 (accessed 4 October, 2023), <https://przekroj.pl/en/society/the-stalkers-daughter-renata-lis>.

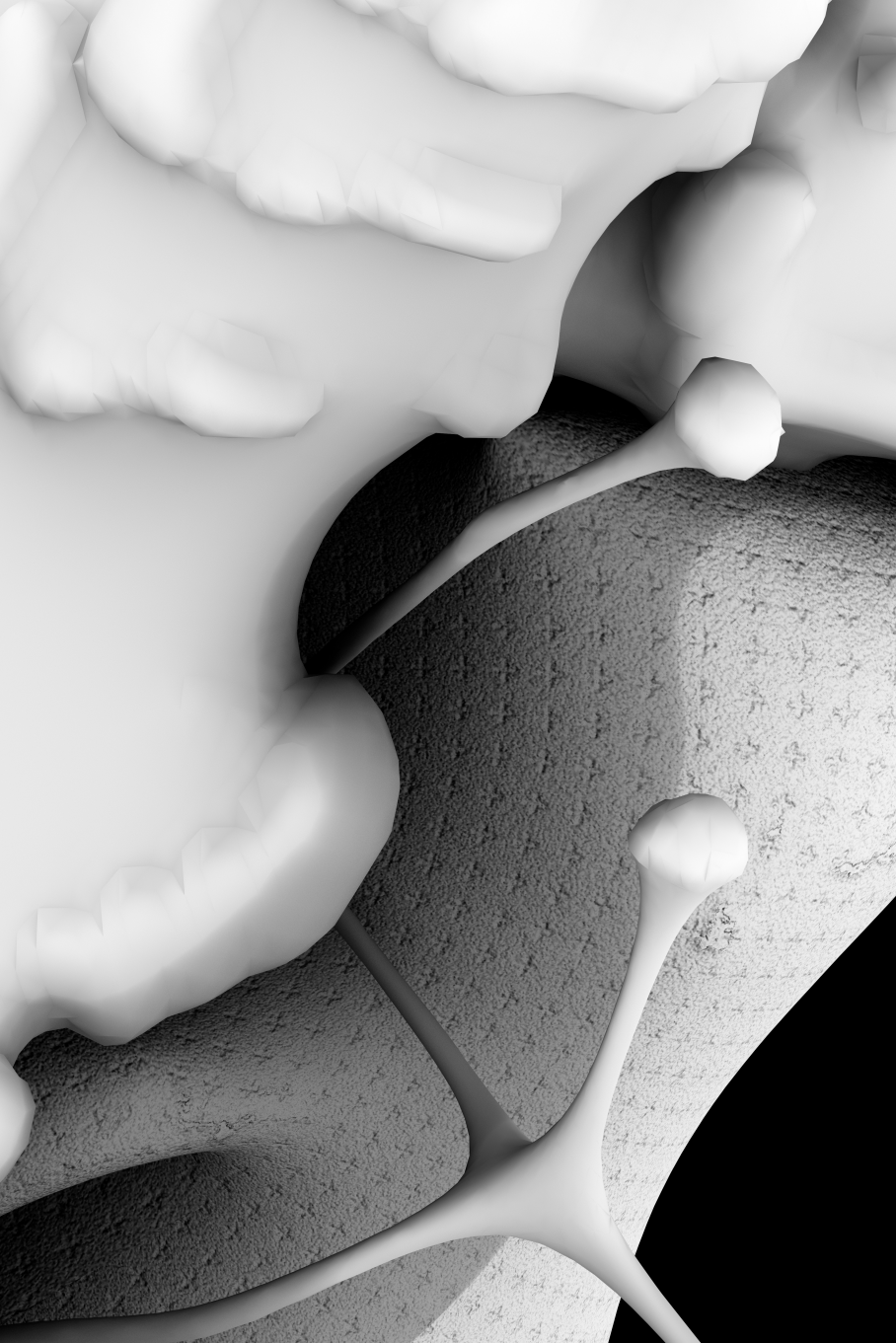
II.
COMPARATIVE XENOLOGY

While I was looking away from Earth, and turned towards the rest of the universe, I didn't feel connection; I didn't feel attraction. What I understood, in the clearest possible way, was that we were living on a tiny oasis of life, surrounded by an immensity of death. I didn't see infinite possibilities of worlds to explore, of adventures to have, or living creatures to connect with. I saw the deepest darkness I could have ever imagined, contrasting starkly with the welcoming warmth of our nurturing home planet.[1]

—William Shatner

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.

—W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming"



Comparative xenology (CX) aims to provide a contemporary definition of the xeno as a typology for addressing the recent boom in the use of the morpheme 'xeno' in various cultural and artistic projects. Such a theory is currently lacking. It approaches the contemporary xeno as seen in the textual wild, i.e. with a direct view to the recent projects which have been utilizing the morpheme and developing its significations into the now.[2] It thus develops from a particular need, insofar as the xeno has undergone an explosion in the frequency of use in the last decade, and such a cultural and aesthetic development merits closer analysis.

It has been stated in the introduction that the starting point for framing comparative xenology is found in a semiotic gesture in which the weight of analysis shifts from the assumption of 'xeno' in a compound noun as a modifier (i.e. xeno*feminism*), towards considering it as the main morpheme (i.e. *xeno*feminism) – like Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit illusion, such a shift in perspective constitutes the methodological grounding of comparative xenology and engages all the 'xenosciences' within a similar field of signification. The preceding Part I aimed to show just how diverse such a field has been in the latter half of the 20th century and how it became remediated into the digital.

Comparative xenology attempts to frame a syntagmatic typology of the contemporary xeno through a comparative method in order to synthesize a generally applicable typology for framing the xeno in the now. It identifies the three modes of comparative xenology – the figural, the procedural, and the inhuman. Such an analysis is supported by three case studies – xenofeminism, xeno-architecture, and xenoplanetarity, respectively.

Part II in this sense proposes a possible tripartite typology of the xeno, but any project which explicitly deals with the xeno assumes that these three ideal types overlap and collude with each other. Comparative xenology attempts to synthesize a general analysis of the connotations of xeno in the cultural and theoretical discourses of the present day, identifying its qualities and characteristics, and showing its role in formulating the contemporary planetary stratigraphy of strangeness and alienation.

the figural mode

Since its first appearance in anglophone writing, the xeno has been significantly weighted as a figural trope, denoting otherness mostly within an intersubjective frame. As noted in Part I, the classical Greek *xenos* denoted a figural "stranger" or "guest-friend," and such a figural frame has remained with it to this day, prompting integral questions of abjection and attraction, hospitality and hostility. The xeno morpheme indeed finds its most frequent current use in the term 'xenophobia'[3] which has come to signify a general fear of the strange, and particularly that of persons-strangers. 'Xenophobia' has been used in the English language since at least 1880, when it first appears in London-based *The Daily News* of April 12. It is worth mentioning that the Merriam-Webster dictionary comments that 'xenophobia' in fact "appears to have arrived on the heels of another late-19th century coinage 'xenomania'," i.e. "an inordinate attachment to foreign things'" which "sadly," quoth the dictionary, "has proved to not have the same currency as xenophobia."[4] One can only agree that the word 'xenomania' has fallen out of use, and that we see 'xenophobia' and 'xenophobic' as the most frequent iterations of the xeno in contemporary English language.

It is one of the objectives of this book to explode the significations of the xeno beyond the paranoid, xenophobic imaginary, and there are many precedents to formulating such a theory. The contemporary iteration of the xeno as a figural trope will be analyzed especially with a view to the recent formulation of xenofeminism by members of the Laboria Cuboniks work group whose work has been highly influential over the past decade and has directly contributed to the construction of the contemporary figurations of the xeno. The development of xenofeminism from and in opposition to cyberfeminism has been noted, and by developing on the preceding exposition to the CCRU's cybertheory and its relation to the xeno, this chapter aims to analyze the prominent place of cyberfeminism in 1990s anglophone theory.

In her influential lecture "The Feminine Cyberspace,"[5] Sadie Plant critiques a particular metaphorical approach to cyberspace, suggesting that it works as an extension of the western patriarchal imaginarium of classical cybernetics associated with control mechanisms made

possible by the knowledge and practical utilization of iterable feedback mechanisms. Plant suggests that "almost all of our notions, or most of feminism's previous notions, of what woman is and what woman may be, and consequently what woman's relation to technology may be, are really found to be wanting."[6] According to Mia Consalvo, Sadie Plant's formulation of cyberfeminism assumed that "women are naturally suited to using the Internet, because women and the Internet are similar in nature— both," according to Plant, "are non-linear, self-replicating systems concerned with making connections."[7]

The term 'cyberfeminism' was first used in 1991 by the Australian collective VNS Matrix, and Plant's cyberfeminism constituted one aspect of a spectrum of feminist projects which explored and concretized the relationship of gender to technology throughout the 1990s. Prefigured by the work of Shulamith Firestone, particularly her work *The Dialectic of Sex*, and Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*, 'cyberfeminism' became an important term for defining feminist theory from the 1990s onwards, offering a particular vantage for questioning the role of woman in relation to technologies, and digital technologies in particular.

In the anglophone sphere, cyberfeminism became a receptacle for an artistic and political project which concretized third-wave feminism within the frame of the then-nascent digital technologies. It approached gender and subjectivity with a practical and theoretical interest in new media and digital technologies, and aimed to formulate a critical politics by means of artistic gestures of disruption, glitching or hacking. It engaged with new digital media from the position of a (counter)culture, aiming to identify and critique cybernetic governance projects predicated on hegemonic control at the hands of state actors and digital corporations. In this way, cyberfeminism became a vector of opposition to the specter of a digital 'patriarchy' – the cyberfeminists of the Australian VNS Matrix collective for example styled themselves as "saboteurs of big daddy mainframe"[8] and, in answer to the globalist oligarchization of the neo-liberal project of their time, aimed to explore their potential subversion at the particular intersections of feminism, politics, and digitality.

The question of subjectivity and embodiment became central to the formulation of cyberfeminist theory insofar as it navigated the notion of embodiment within the newly

minted "cyberspace." But its problematic construction of figurality at the same time doubled as critique – between its subjectivation of the affluent social position of those on the side of the digital divide and the leveling of racial and class problematics which went with "passing" in cyberspace,[9] it has been argued that cyberfeminism was in fact ill-equipped to tackle the actual problems of its era, offering merely aesthetic and imaginary solutions to the real and systemic problems of intersubjective and societal power relations.

One fundamental realization of late second-wave feminism was that the feminist struggle for emancipation was itself split along increasingly visible fault lines. This was one of the central outcomes of a self-critique of the US and North American feminist movement which would eventually develop into the third-wave intersectional analysis. Throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s, such a development was progressively giving heretofore marginalized people and life worlds – often those who were non-white, gay, lesbian and trans – a new voice.

Feminism of the second wave also developed a particular shift in the understanding of embodiment and the lived experience of those who might not be privileged with white skin, trans-generational capital, or other markings of socio-economic prestige.[10] Cyberfeminism then becomes formulated outside of the explicitly American context, but at a point when second-wave feminism was left fragmented, de-centered, and beset by internal dissention. In contrast to an engaged intersectional critique developing in the US,[11] the political impacts and relevance of cyberfeminism in formulating a valid position of critique is often considered misplaced.[12]

In their 2002 book *Domain Errors: Cyberfeminist Practices!*, Maria Fernandez and Faith Wilding of the subRosa collective analyze the relationship of cyberfeminism to certain questions opened (and left ultimately unresolved) by second-wave feminism, writing that

> although cyberfeminism presents itself as inclusive, cyberfeminist writings assume an educated, white, upper middle-class, English speaking, culturally sophisticated readership. Ironically, this attitude replicates the damaging universalism of 'old-style feminism'.[13]

Considering this 'old-style feminism' of the second wave, Fernandez and Wilding note that cyberfeminism did not manage to resolve the question of embodiment and equality of access but rather re-mediated the very same issues into the realm of the virtual, or so-called 'cyberspace'. The universal protocol of zeroes and ones did not particularly resolve the pressing social issues of lived experience. By adopting the new potentialities of digital technologies as its vehicle, cyberfeminism engaged in exploring the relationship of woman and technology within a digitally native context while leaving some of the most pressing questioning coming out of the second wave unanswered.

In attempting to reclaim the more productive aspects of cyberfeminism, it is necessary to cut away some of its sublime aspects – such as the love of flight, hyperbole, universality, and aesthetic subversion. This may bring it closer to the wider field of feminist studies of science and technology – or what Judith Wajcman has termed 'technofeminism.' Although Wajcman acknowledges that "cyberfeminism marks a new relationship between feminism and technology,"[14] she critiques Plant's abduction of the relationship between woman and techné, writing that "Plant [...] celebrates cybertechnology out of control because, for her, out of control signifies freedom from male control."[15] Plant's reactionary ethic of deterritorialization via digitality constitutes a vector for the rift with both the socialist politics of Wajcman's technofeminism as well as the inchoately intersectional approaches to class politics later notably developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Wajcman:

> cyberfeminism needs to be understood as a reaction to the pessimism of the 1980s feminist approaches that stressed the inherently masculine nature of techno-science. In contrast, cyberfeminism emphasizes women's subjectivity and agency, and the pleasures immanent in digital technologies. They accept that industrial technologies did indeed have a patriarchal character, but insist that new digital technologies are much more diffuse and open.[16]

This diffusion qua openness is a major source of optimism for 1990s cyberfeminism, which stressed the subversion of dense techno-economic systems in favor of deterritorialization, untethered production, bumptious

pirating, hacking, and the re-appropriation of the means of digital production. But where technofeminism interprets such new-found technological agencies as part of a socialist politics (for example studying and robustly critiquing the "feminization" of labor and workplace systematics), cyberfeminism often celebrated the advent of a feminized technological sublime by aesthetic means, integrating bodies with silicone circuits, and de-materializing their lived conditions in order to re-mediate them (often better and fitter) in virtual space.[17]

A fundamental trope which has reformulated the position of the body in relation to technology and cybernetic media can be found in Donna Haraway's concept of the "cyborg." Mia Consalvo asserts that in her seminal text *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) Haraway "argues for a socialist, feminist cyborg that challenges the singular identities and 'grids of control' that work to contain women and other marginalized groups"[18] – this statement shows the grounding which reconnects technology with its social and material substrate and away from the specular runaway cyberpositivity of Land and Plant. When read in Haraway's original context, the cyborg stands in tentative opposition to cyberpositivity insofar as it posits alternate potentialities for bodies which may function beyond the standard protocols of reproductive politics, but also beyond the privileged segment of the digital divide. The same cannot be said for cyberfeminism which, on the contrary, was carried by the promise of digital technologies, and structured the digital as a separate space in which true virtuality exists in opposition to the conservative drag of the actual. Developing her own particular assemblage theory, Haraway however posits a logic of interaction between living bodies and technological artefacts which rather navigates the rhythms and limits of biological substrates, their vulnerabilities and mutually situated positions – rather than a line of flight, the cyborg becomes a material part-object, enmeshed and nested within a dense assemblage of material and social relations which it reshapes and repurposes.

This reformulation of the porosity and mutual engagement of the socio-technological boundaries also opens a theoretical space which works beyond the rigid gender binary and the dialectical constructs of biological/mechanical or transcendent/profane. As Haraway famously writes, she "would rather be a cyborg than a goddess,"[19] meaning that she would prefer to see her

body as a part-object enmeshed in material relations and "promiscuous couplings" with its environment and other bodies through horizontal exchange and mutual meaning-making, rather than be locked within the sublimity of a transcendent complex. The cyborg in this sense stands separate from the hierarchical, fetishized, and essentialist notion of a "goddess" and becomes a call to embrace the expanding complexity of technological environments exceeding the transcendence of *Being* towards the co-constitutive *becoming* with and through diverse systems.

Although Haraway's cyborg theory has, to a degree, developed a positive attitude to positive feedback loops in that it expressed the need to update architectures of knowledge and rationality towards socialist ends (to, ultimately, "stay with the Trouble" and "make kin in the Chthulhucene")[20] her ideas cannot be contained solely within the imaginary realm of "cyberspace" but rather work to cultivate the posthuman sensibility. Her formulation of a new materialist feminism charts an influential vector which stands in tension with the dematerialized economy of the signifier we see in cyberfeminism. And where cyberfeminism opted for a dematerialization of the (female) body as a new universal for the digital landscape, Haraway's prefiguration of the cyborg reclaimed it from the cybernetic command and control of the previous decades while simultaneously questioning the affirmative social, material and technological conditions which determine it. We can say that where cyberfeminism was complicit with the liberal acceleration of state and corporate apparatuses, Haraway's cyborg theory retained the implications of existence outside of such a sphere, and her cyborg theory remains robustly materialist and socially speculative.

Although cyberfeminism was a crucible for the exploration of the implications of the figural xeno, Plant's work with the CCRU remained complicit with the hijacking of the xeno beyond a materialist figurality in favor of an imaginary technical sublime carried on the wings of the then-nascent digital media. Deterritorialized cyberspace eventually showed itself to be much less viable than at first seemed.[21] And although comparative xenology reflects these first stirrings of the xeno in the context of digitality and its attendant politics, it rather finds its proper figural mode in the cyborg theory of Donna Haraway and the posthuman politics which have been building on it since the turn of the millennium.

1. William Shatner, “My Trip to Space Made me Realise We have Only One Earth – It Must Live Long and Prosper,” The Guardian (7 December 2022), accessed 21 June 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/dec/07/william-shatner-earth-must-live-long-and-prosper-aoe.
2. For an expanding list of xeno projects, please see Part III – Sightings (a xenoglossary) of this publication, where you can find many notable uses of the ‘xeno’ morpheme in various art and theory projects of the present day. The xenoglossary is being updated regularly at Diffractions Collective website: https://diffractionscollective.com/2024/04/19/xenology-a-xenoglossary/.
3. Here I used the Google NGram viewer to compare the words ‘xenophobia’, ‘xenophilia’, ‘xenofeminism’, ‘xeno-architecture’, ‘xenoplanetarity’. Only the first two terms are even recognized – a direct example of the xeno* at work, facilitated through the protocols of an internet search-database.
4. “The History of the Word Xenophobia,” Merriam-Webster, accessed 5 June 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/a-short-history-of-xenophobia.
5. Given on March 12 at the Institute of Contemporary Arts London conference Seduced & Abandoned: The Body in the Virtual World.
6. Sadie Plant, “The Feminine Cyberspace,” Seduced & Abandoned conference (12-13 March 1994), ICA London, accessed 5 June 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doL9mRMEUGw&list=PLHZc-7v6UhVLfLPn8S2UGqh8wP3l7ZCu4&index=2 (7.30).
7. Mia Consalvo, “Cyberfeminism,” Encyclopedia of New Media (California: SAGE, 2002), SAGE Reference Online, 4 April 2012, accessed 4 June 2023, https://study.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/Ch17_Cyberfeminism.pdf.
8. VNS Matrix, “The Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century,” VNS Matrix.net (1991), accessed 5 June 2023, https://vnsmatrix.net/projects/the-cyberfeminist-manifesto-for-the-21st-century.
9. Lisa Nakamura, “Race In/For Cyberspace: Identity Tourism and Racial Passing on the Internet,” Sociable Media Group (1995), accessed 5 June 2023, https://smg.media.mit.edu/library/nakamura1995.html.
10. See for example the Combahee River Collective’s Combahee River Collective Statement (1977), the thoughts and works of Audre Lorde (for example Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches, 1984) or Marsha P. Johnson.
11. Intersectional discourse developed within the socio-political and cultural situation of the US, and it was there that the predominantly white, liberal feminism of the second wave was inching towards a more engaged social analysis of power relations analyzing the standing juridical and social systemics which circumscribed and interpellated the stranger.
12. Maria Fernandez, Faith Wilding, Michelle M. Wright, eds., Domain Errors: Cyberfeminist Practices! (New York: Autonomedia, 2002), 17.

13. Maria Fernandez, Faith Wilding, Michelle M. Wright, eds., Domain Errors: Cyberfeminist Practices! (New York: Autonomedia, 2002), 21.
14. Judy Wajcman, TechnoFeminism (Oxford: polity, 2004), 63.
15. Wajcman, TechnoFeminism, 71.
16. Wajcman, TechnoFeminism, 63.
17. Such re-mediation is a standard trope of the "cyberpunk" fiction of William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, both quoted and referenced at length in Plant's Zeroes + Ones and both having a seminal impact on the aesthetics and tropes of the cyber-culture of the 1990s. It is notable that Bruce Sterling was also featured in the conference Seduced and Abandoned: The Body in the Virtual World along with Sadie Plant, Rosi Braidotti and others. See Bruce Sterling, "The Colonisation of Cyberspace," Seduced and Abandoned conference (12–13 March 1994), ICA London, accessed 5 June 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSINgf_UBS8.
18. Consalvo, Cyberfeminism.
19. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149-181.
20. Donna J. Haraway, Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene (Duke University Press, 2016).
21. One particular dream of runaway liberal capital was recalibrated in the dotcom crash of the late 1990s, which exposed the speculative and venture projects of digital capital as finite structures with their own particular social and economic dynamic, the first insistence of a postinternet sensibility. For an analysis of postinternet, see Hito Steyerl, Duty Free Art: Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War (Verso, 2019), as well as the work of Fatima Al-Qadiri, Marisa Olson, James Bridle, or Sophia Al-Maria. Geert Lovink's recent Extinction Internet: Our Inconvenient Truth Moment (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2022) stands as a recent development of 'postinternet.'

xeno and posthuman feminism

The 1992 exhibition *Post Human* curated by Jeffrey Deitch provides one of the first formulations of posthuman aesthetics and theory. The discursive impact of this group exhibition consisted in its grappling with the early 1990s zeitgeist by means of a "new figurative art," and the curatorial text stipulates that the exhibition aimed to feature

> young artists focusing on technological advancement, social and aesthetic pluralism, and new frontiers in identity [...] dealing with the new conceptions of the body and the new definitions of self [...] exploring through their art the same questioning of traditional notions of gender, sexuality, and self-identity that is taking place in the world at large.[1]

In terms of the exhibition's themes and content, the curatorial text constructs posthumanism as a project questioning the limits and "new conceptions of the body," as well as exploring identity and "notions of gender," while formally speaking, the featured art works explore new technological means which were developing at the time. *Post Human* problematized the human self-image as it was manifest in cultural, aesthetic, and political praxis, and Deitch writes that much of the new art was "figurative to and descriptive of the 'real' world, but it cannot in fact be called realistic in the conventional sense. That is because so much of the 'real' world that [the featured artists] are reacting to has in fact become artificial."[2] Foreshadowing questions of artificiality, virtuality, avatarism, and replication, the exhibition's aesthetics worked through a particular logic addressing a decaying sense of a stable, shared 'reality,' which was fraying in direct proportion to the expansion of anthropogenic imagery facilitated by digital technologies. Its formal language largely developed through countercultural gestures such as detournement, collage, and pastiche. Deitch writes:

> With the concept of the real disintegrating through an acceptance of the multiplicity of reality models and through the embrace of artificiality, Realism as we used to know it

> may no longer be possible. This new figurative art may actually mark the end of Realism rather than its revival.[3]

Deitch's take on the posthuman is in this sense part of a spectrum of work that remains focused on anthropogenic means of signification and arguably remains tethered to the workings of semiotic capital. Such an approach however on multiple counts misconstrues posthumanism as one more step in the long tradition of human exceptionalism. This chapter argues that the posthuman is not so much comprehended by a new figuralism bypassing the Real in any sense; but rather that in the encounter of the Real with the human self-image, it is figuralism as we have known it that "may no longer be possible" under the same conditions. There are other vectors for exploring posthumanity which might be navigated to better results and with direct and far-reaching impact on its contemporary formulation.

Although Haraway's aforementioned early formulations of cyborg theory have remained fundamental for cultural theory, she has in her more recent work distanced herself from its overdetermined and fundamentally anthropocentric roots, and has even worked to move beyond the label of the contemporary posthuman sensibility as such, writing that "We are humus, not Homo, not anthropos; we are compost, not posthuman."[4] It is perhaps telling that in her book *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), she approaches figurality as a less aesthetic and more material phenomenon – the body for her becomes less a concept for metaphorization and rather a site for diverse and mutually interactive material processes which are oftentimes far removed from the explicit histories and self-images of the Anthropos and its previous historiography; humanity thus becomes intensely indexical to processes which had previously lay outside of its self-image, yet which have conclusively and implicitly formed it. The human body here serves as the conduit or host, much like "compost" is an index to the countless metabolisms which intersect it – the prefix 'com-' here, after all denotes a bringing "together, together with."[5] We can thus consider it as being properly "synthetic" in a posthuman sense.

In *Staying with the Trouble*, Haraway extensively focuses on the conditions and effects of integrated "sympoesis,"[6] or "making-with" among diverse actors, both human and non-human, for example discussing

the ways various substances and supplements can affect our hormone production and shift gendered identities in quite concrete and material ways. Focusing on the non-linear intra-action of the biosphere and its inhabitants, Haraway calls for a new sociality based on "making kin," one which would stand against the legacy systems and clan structures defined by blood and soil. Her work moves beyond the confines of the cultural paranoia of western patrilineality in favor of new social and progressive political forms of making sense in the here and now, ones which may benefit the construction of affective ties among diverse actors in heretofore unrealized ways. In exploring the multivalent relations among various inchoate agents, Haraway opens spaces for particularly "situated knowledges"[7] which might work against any monoculture tending towards its own universality. And she finds feminism at the forefront of just such a struggle for the posthuman condition.

In her vision of the mythical "Children of Compost," Haraway reflects on the role feminism has played in the construction of western subjectivity and its role in the posthuman turn:

> By the early twenty-first century, historical social action and cultural and scientific knowledges – much of it activated by anticolonial, antiracist, proqueer feminist movement – had seriously unraveled the once-imagined natural bonds of sex and gender and race and nation.[8]

The 'unraveling' of these "natural" bonds suturing the interstitial gaps inherent in the standing formulations of nature-culture reinvents the concept of posthuman figurality. It shows figures to rather be manifest assemblages of life worlds existing at the material site of the planet, and thus constitutes an attempt to develop a responsivity to the myriad existences which exceed the current self-image of the human and recontextualize planetary relations, making posthumanism a philosophy which works against a "natural" collusion with various conceptual status quos. Posthumanism in this way constitutes a semiotic event horizon in which the figural self-image of the human has everywhere been exposed as partial, virtual, and always engaged with the more-than-human world.

Such a dissolution of the limits structuring the human self-image are furthermore found in various spheres of

life and in diverse social, technical or ecological registers; and Rosi Braidotti has situated this transversal coalescence of a manifest, planetary Real through the idea of an ongoing "posthuman convergence."[9] Building on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatari, Braidotti's work complexifies their original conceptions of territorialization and nomadology to eventually turn away from the post-structuralist linguistic approach in favor of adopting a materialist and explicitly feminist approach.[10] Similarly to Haraway, Braidotti considers feminist theory as one of "the percussors of the posthuman turn"[11] insofar as it "create[s] the alternative visions of 'the human' generated by people who were historically excluded from, or only partially included"[12] within the category of 'the human,' and have not been granted its entitlements and responsibilities. Writing about her present socio-cultural moment, Braidotti notes in *Posthuman Feminism* that the "sexualized, racialized, naturalized minorities – 'the others' – are moving centre stage, pushing dominant 'man' (or Anthropos) off-centre."[13] Such a reappraisal of the Anthropos coupled with a radical and reflexive openness to the situated, historically oppressed voices and bodies thus constitutes an ethical challenge and provides one of the prime motives for the transformation of a humanist figurality in favor of a posthuman one.

While Deitch's posthumanism was initially directly implicated with the modes of production of the Euro-Atlantic art market (i.e. the "new figurative art [...] emerging through the channel of the conceptual, body and performance art of the late '60s and '70s")[14] and drew on the legacy of artistic and theoretical framings of the body as a trope of individualized and capitalized consumption and representation, posthuman figurality stands against such a transhumanism carried by the financialized flows of art capital. The posthuman figure develops not only on the level of symbolic signification within the workings of various semiotic capitals, but also through its non-reducible agency which consists in its particular, situated enmeshment with the material biosphere and the planet. Significations of the posthuman can thus move beyond the onrush of habituated figural tropes of a techno-determined cyborgism and can rather be mobilized to grapple with the contingent and present realities of the planetary situation and its socio-political pathologies. Such a subjectivity – formulated on the basic material logic of species-being, rather than any privileged

position on the receiving end of the digital divide and its economies of signification (as is the case of cyberfeminism) – indicates a cultural shift towards a non-universalist, social, environmental, and pragmatic form of subjectivity. It is such a position that Rossi Braidotti considers a necessary 'strategic anthropocentrism'[15] in the proper sense of the term.

We can find inklings of posthuman figurality in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's framing of the politics of the subaltern[16] who famously "cannot speak" due to their ostracization and casting as 'other' from the side of discourse. But it must be noted that although the posthuman and the sub-altern stand in mutual thematic and historical relation, they cannot be reduced to a single universal concept, as such a leveling would threaten to defuse the productive dissonances which resonate between them. Their parallax comparison rather grasps that the posthuman xeno is split between the *absence* of speech and the *responsibility* to its speech. Systemic violence and suffering perpetrated on the marginalized can only be reflected through the construction of a precarious subjectivity, but one which is not banished to the position of victimhood and robbed of its speech indefinitely, as a *fait accompli*. This posthuman figurality must also not become subsumed under the ideological niche of any eco-realism – for example espoused in Newton Harrison's concept of the "dictatorship of the ecology,"[17] where the human is reduced to a type of material without a socially and ethically robust system to account for its persisting life, reproduction, and responsibility to itself and the wider biosphere.

The posthumanity explored in the late-20th-century works of Braidotti, Haraway or Spivak thus never assumes an evacuation of the social by other means, i.e. a type of final solution to the problem of planetary existence, but rather constitutes a blueprint for a synthetic living (a being-with) beyond the grasp of puerile and exclusive politics (i.e. those of nation, race, or tribe) as much as the reproductive and integrally reductive mechanisms of capital accumulation and investment.

The figural mode of the xeno in this regard stands as the fallout of post-humanism without reducing its complexity and multitude of situated positions. It rather aims to frame a robust methodology for ethical living on an increasingly precarious planet. Such a subjectivity is becoming formulated around alienation as a pervasive affect and zeitgeist of the first decades of the 21st century.

As the next section focusing on the concept of xenohospitality shows, such a social ontology does not negate the human's essential capacity for caretaking and its privileged position in mitigating the pathologies perpetrated by its own species.

1. Jeffrey Deitch, Post Human, exhibition (June 1992–October 1993), deitch.com, accessed 5 June 2023, https://www.deitch.com/archive/curatorial/post-human.
2. Deitch, Post Human.
3. Deitch, Post Human.
4. Haraway, Staying with the Trouble, 55; for Haraway's repositioning of the original tenets of The Cyborg Manifesto, see the interview Sarah Franklin, "Staying with the Manifesto: An Interview with Donna Haraway," Theory, Culture & Society, vol. 0, no. 0 (2017), accessed 5 June 2023, https://monoskop.org/images/9/9f/Franklin_Sarah_2017_Staying_with_the_Manifesto_An_Interview_with_Donna_Haraway.pdf.
5. 'com-', Online Etymological Dictionary (October 13, 2021), accessed 24 June 2023, https://www.etymonline.com/word/com-.
6. Haraway, Staying with the Trouble, 125.
7. Donna J. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," Feminist Studies, vol. 14, no. 3 (Autumn, 1988), 575-599.
8. Haraway, Staying with the Trouble, 152.
9. Rosi Braidotti, Posthuman Feminism (Cambridge: polity, 2022), 2.
10. Rosi Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory (Columbia University Press, 1994). This fact is testified to also in her 1994 lecture "The Body as Metaphor," given at the same event where Sadie Plant gave her aforementioned seminal lecture "The Feminine Cyberspace"
11. Braidotti, Posthuman Feminism, 2.
12. Braidotti, Posthuman Feminism, 3.
13. Braidotti, Posthuman Feminism, 5.
14. Deitch, Post Human.
15. Rosi Braidotti, Posthuman Feminism (Cambridge: polity, 2022), 38.
16. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, eds., Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture (Macmillan Education, 1988), 271-313.
17. Vít Bohal, "I Think Humanity Is Going to Die," interview with Newton Harrison and Force Majeure, Agosto Foundation (2 February, 2020), accessed 5 June 2023, https://agosto-foundation.org/i-think-humanity-is-going-to-die.

xenofeminism: Plant, Land and xenohospitality

Xenofeminism (XF) is one of the projects attempting to put in focus some of the caveats of the cyber-optimism of the 1990s and explicitly shape the discourse on the contemporary xeno. Through analyzing the technical means at hand within the context of contemporary feminism, the xenofeminist project aimed at repurposing "the master's tools"[1] to better and more ethically transform the contemporary socio-technical landscape. XF was in this sense formulated as a direct answer to accelerationist politics, attempting to reclaim a feminist and socially engaged dimension,[2] while further developing some of the questions and problems posed by accelerating technological development, and particularly in relation to its capacity to generate pervasive alienation.

The work of the Laboria Cuboniks work group (which originally formulated XF) in this sense constitutes part of a rising body of theory of the early 2010s which approached technology within an explicitly postcybernetic landscape. Although an exhaustive discussion of accelerationism is beyond the scope of this work, it must be noted that the fundamental distinction between so-called 'right-' and 'left-accelerationism' consists in their conflicting approaches to the question of cybernetics and their ramifications for issues of political control. And although Left accelerationism[3] attempted to wrest a socially progressive politics from right accelerationism's fall into rabid liberalism,[4] the way it addressed such social implications was found suspect on many counts (for example in its advance of an ethics of privilege or its drive towards a Promethean ideal, pithily called "Brometheanism"[5] by Alex Galloway).

One can say that xenofeminism leveraged the dynamic, irreverent energy of cyberfeminism while attempting to remain grounded within a more robust social ethics attempting to reflect the actual conditions of life for large segments of the planetary population, and questioning the distribution of entitlement, inclusion, hybridity, and responsive rationality.

Or so it would seem...

The following section will aim to put into perspective some of the critique which was leveled at the project in the years following its formulation, particularly that of artist and theorist Annie Goh for whom the problem and connotations of the xeno take center stage.

The Laboria Cuboniks work group launched the xenofeminist project in 2014 with the manifesto *Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation* in which the collective vowed to "strategically deploy existing technologies to re-engineer the world"[6] as a vector for problematizing the position of gender and technology. Their theory was consciously constructed with a view to contemporary technological developments, such as the rise of online platforms, the dynamics of various digital divides, or the new possibilities of biohacking. Although XF assumed the posthuman realization that planetary processes outscale the human, it also moved to resocialize technology as a form of strategic gesture – and in this regard, XF comprised one of the vectors discussed throughout this book which re-domesticates the xeno of the cyberpositive 1990s into a proper techno-feminism working upon the backdrop of a posthuman ontology.

The manifesto reads:

> Technology isn't inherently progressive. Its uses are fused with culture in a positive feedback loop that makes linear sequencing, prediction, and absolute caution impossible. Technoscientific innovation must be linked to a collective theoretical and political thinking in which women, queers, and the gender non-conforming play an unparalleled role.[7]

XF attempts to mesh technological innovation with a particular social context and affirms that the two spheres have never in fact been separate – that technology is always nested within a particular social praxis. Among other things, this approach presumes a move beyond the vilification of the instrumental use of technology, which has been a hallmark of numerous nativist and essentializing strands of feminism (ecofeminism and gender critical feminism foremost,[8] writes Helen Hester), and rather supports a proactive engagement with the tools at hand. Picking up on the legacy of left accelerationism, such a project is preoccupied with working at scale and wresting feminism from a countercultural position in favor of cultivating its engagement with the plasticity and mutability of technology as a particular arena of struggle for social politics. and the "theoretical and political thinking" which it inevitably entails.

In its materialist posthumanism, the Laboria Cuboniks work group stands as heir to Haraway's call to reflect situated knowledges.[9] But rather than wager on the assumption that technology is commensurate with schismatic violence, xenofeminism explicitly aims to move beyond the politics of essence in order "to construct a coalitional politics, a politics without the infection of purity"[10] which would embrace the alienation of social relations and their distribution via the technological milieu. It is in this way that XF can be said to be 'accelerationist' also in the socio-cultural sense: rather than adopting lines of flight or exit on the fictitious wings of techno-capital, it reorients the critique towards the social by showing the embeddedness of technology in socio-cultural practice and the non-trivial feedback loops existing between them. It is in this way poised to address the increasing acceleration of socio-cultural affect and pervasive alienation afforded by digital technologies within a socio-cultural context.

Importantly, XF's "politics of alienation" do not consider alienation as a negative political phenomenon as in the feminism of the second wave and the new left movements which often attempted to reclaim an imaginary essence as a bulwark against the disruption of their coherent self-image. Laboria Cuboniks rather consider everyone to be incrementally alienated in various intersectional assemblages, understanding alienation as a universal affect mediated by the unavoidable prerogatives of the current social and technical situation. From such a position, they propose a new theory of contemporary subjectivity: "We are all alienated – but have we ever been otherwise?"[11] they write in the manifesto.

Alienation is then assumed to open a paradoxical space of sociality and reason which cuts through some of the issues proposed by contemporary identity politics. Where in its classical meaning of 'stranger' the *xenos* was a force coming from the outside (and one usually locked in a mutual, if asymmetric, engagement with the binding point of an aristocratic, hierarchical domus or polis), XF's assessment that "we are all alienated" opens a space for a differently structured, multicentric plane of social interaction which takes alienation as a basic axiom of productive sociality. This approach is firmly engaged with the shared social project of *xenia* – where traditionally alienation was an index of outsideness and foreignness, XF develops it as a structural feature of contemporary life worlds.

This gesture of ubiquitous alienation shares much with the political theory of Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Xenology* series (discussed in Part I) – it too aimed to open a new plane of socialization, albeit through the medium of cosmopolitan, Relational and idiosyncratic performance art.

Although both share a taste for shaping and dissolving the tyranny of habituated sense-making of the various nativist state and identitarian structures (or what Wodiczko associated with the power dynamics of the City of Victors),[12] Wodiczko's scale of engagement was still calibrated for globalist individualism and cosmopolitanism. The Xeno-feminists' emphasis on the ubiquity and inevitability of alienation rather finds its universality in an alienated, posthuman subjectivity in which the ideological and aesthetic contours of Euro-Atlantic metropolises make way for a structuralist analysis of planetary-scale intersubjectivity. Laboria Cuboniks formulates a split habitus which begs its own pragmatic ethics.

Donna Haraway calls such a possible present the "Chthulucene" – an era based in sym-poesis, or the making and placing together, rather than auto-poesis which works within the frame of personalized, individualized reproduction. Such a xenopolitics rejects the fascist politics of purity on both a personal and social level in favor of constructing a social choreography in which the planetary community of the alienated is not developed on the construction of an imaginary essence structured around the dialectics of pure / impure, or in-group / out-group, but rather through the very condition of their alienation from conservative systems of essence. Alienation is here adopted as both an innoculation against the enclosure of rationality, as well as a productive vehicle for speculation: "Essentialist naturalism reeks of theology—the sooner it is exorcised, the better,"[13] writes Laboria Cuboniks.

But the authenticity and validity of such productive alienation has recently been called into question by artist and theorist Annie Goh in her essay "Appropriating the Alien: A Critique of Xenofeminism."[14] There, Goh explores in detail the question of the xeno in its relation to social politics and with a particular view to the work of Sadie Plant and Nick Land. And although its ultimate outcomes will be shown as problematic, and even misinformed, such a discussion exactly frames the relation of the xeno and sociality as discussed by comparative xenology.

It is telling that the treatment of xenofeminist politics in Goh's essay starts with the assumption that the use of the morpheme 'xeno' is automatically complicit with the politics of 'xenophobia,' as the connotations with xenophobia have been shown to inflect many of the significations of the contemporary xeno.

With veiled appraisal, Goh writes how the xenofeminist collective Laboria Cuboniks was asked at the Berlin launch of their text *Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation* by an audience member about xenofeminism's semantic connection to xenophobia. This prompted a "somewhat awkward answer"[15] from the collective, ultimately acquiescing that they were a feminist collective of women who "are all white and from the global North."[16] Goh takes this statement as exposing the vacuity of XF's employment of "xeno" in relation to difference, identity and otherness, and her essay's subsequent analysis further develops on this suspicion.

In her otherwise brilliant essay, Goh essentially understands the xeno exclusively as being a priori collusive with a right-wing politics of bigotry and whiteness. She in this way accepts the contemporary influence of Nick Land and its discourse as given, somehow making all discussion of the xeno complicit with a regressive paranoia complex. Her essay assumes a history of the xeno which is reductive, focusing solely on the signifier's position within the retrograde ethics of a politics of purity, and considers the employment of 'xeno' in 'xenofeminism' as a mere index to Land's transcendent futurism or, alternately, to the fascist imaginarium as encountered in its contemporary extreme-right politics. In this way, Goh's approach remains willfully myopic to the xeno's potential for engendering and prompting productive mutation.

Goh writes:

> Land's fondness for the 'xeno' prefix is indisputable. Land's 1997 essay 'Meltdown', oft cited by his followers, refers to 'xenodata', 'xenosentience' and 'xenogenetics', and his engagements with the far right began on his infamous blog 'Outside In', which was hosted at the address 'xenosystems.net' [...] Land's xenophobia and his liberal usage of the prefix 'xeno,' particularly since its re-appropriation, has arguably come to overcode the various justifications given for reinvigorating his legacy.[17]

The limits of the essay's understanding pertaining to the semantics of the xeno can be gleaned when Goh goes to talk about its different constructions than those of Land, only to come right back to talking about Land's formulation through his influence on the University of Warwick's Cybernetic Culture Research Unit:

> Beyond these connections to Land, there are other issues which complicate xenofeminism's emancipatory vision. One might look for a xenofeminist pre-history in 'Cyberpositive', the 1994 essay co-authored by Nick Land and Sadie Plant, and in the latter's 1995 book, *Zeros + Ones*, a key cyberfeminist text which excavated feminised histories of computation and mathematics with a view to recoding the masculine-dominated realm of cyberspace.[18]

In light of the previous chapters, the critique is obviously partly misplaced, as Goh seems to productively harangue a fetishization of the 'xeno' morpheme by Land and the wider NRx movement,[19] while in the same sense implicating the cyber-theory of Sadie Plant and disregarding alternate readings of the xeno which carry more cultural weight. As noted in the previous section, the critique of Plant is not entirely off the mark, but despite the cyber-positivity in Plant's work, it is not possible to cast her politics in the same basket as those of Land.

Such an approach is directly critiqued by Jules Joanne Gleeson in her essay "Breakthroughs and Bait: On Xenofeminism and Alienation" which was published just a few months after Goh's and where she directly engages with Goh's essay. Gleeson writes that "(unlike Land) [Plant] remains widely respected in cultural theory"[20] and continues:

> Unfortunately existing criticisms have often restricted themselves to honing in on only the most obvious dubious elements of the text [*Xenofeminism: A Politics of Alienation*], especially its heavy borrowing of phrasing from Nick Land. As an upshot of this, many of the *Manifesto*'s more interesting influences have largely been passed over.[21]

Gleeson here agrees with the notion that Annie Goh's critique indeed focuses only on the work of a particularly problematic employment of the morpheme 'xeno' without accounting for its reinvention and reappropriation within its originally much broader signification. This paradoxically accepts the reactionary xeno in its anti-sociality and its fetishization of the Outside.[22]

Albeit toward the end of her essay, and only as epilogue, Goh does acquiesce that a different approach to the xeno might be adopted, writing that there are "a few glimmers illuminating where we might imagine such a project [of xenofeminism] emerging." Mentioning the works of Kodwo Eshun, Helen Hester or Sarat Maharaj, she also observes that "One might wish to pursue Derrida's writings on generosity to the xeno as the 'outsider', or on the rights of asylum-seekers, refugees and immigrants and the ethics of hospitality."[23] As the previous sections argued, these consideration are indeed capable of re-contextualizing the xeno as a productive force, and the work of the xenofeminists (among others) are doing just that – resocializing the xenophobic imaginarium of the xeno in favor of a productive politics of alienation. It is perhaps too bad that Goh framed her essay as critique rather than as an exploration into those very potentialities which xenofeminism references and develops.

In her advocation for "xeno-hospitality," Laboria Cuboniks member Helen Hester poses just such questions on the production and maintenance of social relations. Her experiment with framing this synthetic kinship aims to move the xeno beyond the xenophobic figurality of the classical self/other dialectic through exploring xenofeminism's reflection of the procedural architectures of our contemporary life worlds. And yet in Annie Goh's essay, Hester's xenohospitality is only mentioned as an afterthought. Although she briefly speculates on the potentiality of re-reading the semiotics of the xeno, she does not pursue the implications of such vectors for constructing the 'xeno' along different lines. At the very end of her essay she writes that

> Hester's single-authored book *Xenofeminism* argues for a xeno-solidarity of kinship, rooted in a 'xeno-hospitality' which strongly refutes the essentialist, cis-heteronormative and capitalist models of kinship which underpin the traditional nuclear family.[24]

Yes, it does, and this particularly rich question asks about a xeno which might lie beyond transcendent technocracy and reactionary politics. Such paths of inquiry help reconnect the discourse on the xeno with a wider philosophy of hospitality. Here I want to take up Goh's challenge and argue that a reading of Hester's 'xeno-hospitality' casts new light on the meaning of the xeno, constructing it along different lines than those of Land's accelerationism and the wider NRx movement.

Helen Hester notably develops the concept of xenohospitality in her book *Xenofeminism*,[25] where she defines it as a "mutational politics"[26] for "the opening up of currently curtailed choices" and for "the creation of the ideological and material infrastructures required to synthesize new desires as accessible [and] feasible."[27] We see Hester arguing for a politics predicated on the opening and exploration of a discursive space and a speculative praxis on the level of the social. Her theory of xenohospitality shows how social dynamics are the site of creative disruption and a test ground for emancipatory virtualities and projections. Where Land considers the xeno as an irruption from a specular and transcendent outside, the xeno of xenohospitality rather understands the manifest movements of culture and community as a source of novelty and difference, seeing the performance of life worlds as a method for developing new avant-gardes.

Hester's focus on "material infrastructures" is very important here, as it integrates the xeno within processes which aim not to retain the figural exoticism of the other, but rather to develop shared life worlds through mutable and socially sensitive protocols. In her essay "Sapience + Care,"[28] Hester further discusses the implications of caretaking as a species-wide program suited for tackling the challenges of the present – most notably climate change and the resulting social precarity and migration. It is the ability to care, to be affected (much like the "response-ability" invoked by Donna Haraway)[29] which for Hester becomes a universal feature of *homo sapiens* and its contemporary condition.

It is Hester's contention that although human action has perpetrated the ongoing Sixth Extinction event of planet Earth and has shown itself to be ambivalently pathological,[30] humanity (here understood as essentially a constructive project of rational bootstrapping) still remains most able to remedy such a state, particularly

through its evolutionary propensity and technical ability to care. Hospitality and methods of caretaking are thus not so much an ideal of humanist charity, but are rather assumed to be systemic approaches to the particular being-in-the-world of the human. Much like Margaret Mead's anecdotal claim that the sign of culture is a healed femur, Hester's xenohospitality implicates the xeno not so much as a transcendent force of the outside (as in the neo-reactionary imaginarium), but rather as a discovery of the social processes which underpin the practice of caretaking and hospitality and the technical milieu which makes such a project possible. Hester's xeno theory in this way redomesticates the xeno[31] while retaining a universalist political horizon which "strive[s] to find intersectional and emancipatory mechanisms for collective social survival."[32] Such ability to care provides a systemic foundation for xenoethics.

It is the potential universalism of such a gesture which remains a point of contention. Where Annie Goh approaches the universalism of XF as an issue of identity politics, largely building on second-wave feminism's preoccupation with personal, identitarian positioning, Hester rather considers XF a way to platform hospitality beyond individual accountability and as an effect and function of cultural and social institutions such as health care systems, utilities infrastructure, reproductive and maintenance systems, pedagogy or caretaking. Especially with new socio-economic stressors, such as the Covid-19 pandemic or the ongoing, accelerating planetary migrations, the depersonalization and systematicity of care indexes its infrastructural scale, as well as begging questions about the relationship between state and private capital and their responsibility to civic society. Hester's notion of xenohospitality in this sense interprets the xeno within an intersectional critique which engages with the actual technical and administrative milieu of the 21st century and speaks to pressing issues, such as the availability of health care, social security and services, or immigration policy.[33] This theoretical method aims to, in the words of Hester's close colleague Diann Bauer, question the "persistent contingency of the conditions in which we are immersed"[34] with a view to synthesizing technical solutions based in political negotiation and rational decision-making.

To return one last time to Goh's original prompt about XF's inopportune use of the xeno: in the epilogue to her piece, we see her praising the possibility of a non-reactionary reading of the xeno, yet she finds

"[the xenofeminist manifesto's] lack of consideration of the historic whiteness of humanist and posthumanist discourses, and its silent continuation of a Landian heritage," indicative of having "failed to do this urgent work, even while it exuberantly remind[s] us that technology is certainly a central battleground for today's feminisms."[35] But where Goh adopts the frame of identity politics and considers XF's protocoling of technology as collusive with 'the master's tools' and with the politics of Nick Land, xenofeminism rather considers the technological milieu as a platform whose thresholds are becoming ever more porous, disseminated, and enmeshed with its own former externalities. Working on the scale of the planetary, xenofeminism expands the figurality of identitarian politics towards an undertsanding and shaping of the synthetic mesh of planetary affordances.

Perhaps the generative and emergent potential of the xeno and its relation to alienation can best be explained beyond the confines of neo-reactionary discourse by invoking Luciana Parisi's notion of xeno-patterning. In her essay "Xeno-Patterning: Predictive Intuition and Automated Patterning,"[36] Parisi explores the reality of "alienness as being central to the formation of patterns."[37] Her abstraction of the question of the xeno in this way follows the xeno-feminist vision of re-patterning social reproduction away from a gendered, racial or "domestic" realism or any other legacy system predicated on reproducing outdated patriarchal politics. In abstracting the xeno as a contingent pattern (perhaps finding resonance with Amy Ireland's call for "alien rhythms"[38]) Parisi constructs a theory of synthetic mutation which retains continuity while affirming the artificiality of its own position.

The xeno in XF thus stands as a project set against any essentialist reading of identity, race and class, one which promotes a new form of species solidarity predicated on mutable social construction and negotiation. Repurposing XF's claim to universality rests exactly on such abstract and synthetic "xeno-patterning" which considers alienation as a prerequisite for actively and collectively designing subjectivity in and through the technological milieu without ever becoming wholly subsumed by it. It in this way charts a vector beyond "the regulatory prediction–control dyad of first-order cybernetics."[39] Rather than assuming XF's nefarious politics due to the discourse's proximity to the work of Nick Land, it would be better to in fact engage with the question of the xeno on the terms XF sets for itself – being

a direct reaction to the anti-human hijacking of the xeno by the discourse of right-accelerationism and reclaiming its ultimately social and emancipatory ends.

As epilogue to this chapter, we can revisit the original proposition of Jacques Derrida's "Foreigner Question" to adopt Émile Benveniste's assumption that the xeno is always nested within the social "pact" of *xenia*, rather than the merely figural *xenos*:

> [Benveniste] inscribes the *xenos* in the *xenia*, which is to say in the pact, in the contract or collective alliance of that name. [...] there is no xenos, there is no foreigner before or outside the xenia, this pact or exchange with a group or, to be more precise, with a line of descent.[40]

Perhaps we can say that today these 'lines of descent' are the contemporary legacy systems left to account for access, privilege, and social difference. Laboria Cuboniks defines XF as a "feminism at ease with computation" (0x07) and one "attuned to the language of architecture as a vocabulary for collective choreo-graphy—the coordinated writing of space."[41] The lines of descent within a technical milieu are those of accreted and automated technologies and architectures (i.e. the computational, technical or physical environments), and XF in this regard cultivates a politics of alienation which takes into account the cybernetic legacy of control systems, reinventing the xeno as a structural and systemic critique. We can say that XF navigates just such a drift from the figural *xenos* to the procedural *xenia* under conditions which take into account computational platforms and infrastructures as protocols of sociality. Such a xenopractice then naturally implies a procedural level at which it is executed, and the following section will address such a sphere in more detail, particularly through the prism of xenoarchitecture.[42]

Seen through the prism of Hester's "xeno-hospitality," the xeno then becomes a horizon of an emergent formulation of social rationality. The focus on its relation to the originary sphere of hospitality productively abducts the xeno back from a Landian technological sublime into a properly technofeminist one in which humanity and technologies are densely intertwined in the reproduction and mutation of social conditions and the shared project of sensing and making sense.

1. Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches (CA: Crossing Press, 2007), 110-114.
2. Helen Hester puts it candidly in conversation with Robert Barry: "In the course of general discussion [among the members of the future Laboria Cuboniks collective], the topic of Accelerationism kept coming up – The Accelerationist Reader had been published just a couple of months before, so it was sort of on everybody's minds. Much of this discussion was quite critical – I personally found some elements of Accelerationism quite frustrating, not least the fact that it was somewhat oblivious to much of the feminist work on science and technology that struck me as a key part of its lineage. There was nearly fifty years of work – at least! – that was being overlooked." See Robert Barry, "Doing Gender: Helen Hester on Xenofeminism," The Quietus (31 March 2018), accessed 6 June 2023, https://thequietus.com/articles/24298-xenofeminism-helen-hester-interview.
3. Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work (Verso, 2015). Srnicek and Williams for example mention the Cybersyn project of the Allende government in Chile as a concrete case study, see pp. 149-151.
4. Its ideas furthermore trickled down to problematic and often outright criminal contexts, for example being rightfully called "a justification for murder" in the case of the Christchurch shooter, see Zack Beauchamp, "Accelerationism: The Obscure Idea Inspiring White Supremacist Killers Around the World," Vox (18 November 2019), accessed 6 June 2023, https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/11/11/20882005/accelerationism-white-supremacy-christchurch.
5. Alexander R. Galloway, "Brometheanism," Culture and Communication (16 June 2017), accessed 6 June 2023, http://cultureandcommunication.org/galloway/brometheanism.
6. Laboria Cuboniks, "Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation," laboriacuboniks.net (2014), 0x02, accessed 6 June 2023, http://www.laboriacuboniks.net/20150612-xf_layout_web.pdf.
7. Cuboniks, 0x02.
8. Helen Hester, Xenofeminism (polity, 2018).
9. In her influential monograph Xenofeminism, Helen Hester indeed positions the collective as "Haraway's disobedient daughters," building on the ground opened by her cyborg theory. Helen Hester, 20.
10. Cuboniks, 0x10.
11. Cuboniks, 0x01.
12. See chapter On xenohospitality
13. Cuboniks, 0x01
14. Annie Goh, "Appropriating the Alien," Mute (29 July 2019), accessed 6 June 2023, https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/appropriating-alien-critique-xenofeminism.
15. Goh, "Appropriating the Alien."

16. The discussed segment in the essay is as follows, Goh writes: “The name ‘xenofeminism’ is one of the first things people often query and I recall an audience question at the book launch regarding the prefix ‘xeno’, in relation to how the collective negotiated any proximity it might therefore seem to have to the commonly associated word ‘xenophobia’. A somewhat awkward answer came back from the collective to the effect that: ‘among us (the authors), some of us are queer, some of us are trans, some of us are mothers […] we are all white and from the Global North.’”
17. Goh, “Appropriating the Alien.”
18. Goh, “Appropriating the Alien.”
19. Here, we can point to Land’s aforementioned affinity for the xeno, as well as Bronze Age Pervert’s campaign as an “anti-xenoestrogen activist” (see @bronzeagemantis, no longer available 5 January 2022, https://ifunny.co/meme/bronze-age-pervert-bronzeagemantis-follows-you-following-aspiring-nudist-bodybuilder-zWsjQl288.
20. Jules Joanne Gleeson, “Breakthroughs and Bait: On Xenofeminism and Alienation,” Mute (19 October 2019) accessed 3 January 2022, https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/breakthroughs-bait-xenofeminism-alienation.
21. Gleeson, “Breakthroughs and Bait.”
22. Robin Mackay, “Nick Land: An Experiment in Inhumanism,” Robin Mackay’s blog, accessed 2 June 2023, http://readthis.wtf/writing/nick-land-an-experiment-in-inhumanism/; “Xeno Buddhism Begins with Xeno,” xenobuddhism (3 March 2018), accessed 6 June 2023, https://xenobuddhism.wordpress.com/2018/03/03/xenobuddhism-begins-with-xeno/.
23. Goh, “Appropriating the Alien.”
24. Goh, “Appropriating the Alien.”
25. Hester, Xenofeminism.
26. Hester, 4.
27. Hester, 64.
28. Helen Hester, “Sapience + Care: Reason and Responsibility in Posthuman Politics,” Angelaki, vol. 24, no. 1 (2019).
29. Donna Haraway, Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulhucene (Duke University Press, 2016), 2.
30. Elizabeth Colbert, The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History (Henry Holt and Company, 2014).
31. As a counter-position, the domestication of the alien is a contentious idea for Margaret Shildrick, who sees the productivity of an outside agent to consist in something which ought to disrupt, something which does not get integrated into the matrix of Derridean “conditional hospitality,” but rather remains unconditionally particular. This belief is problematic in that it assumes exactly the fetishization of ‘xeno’ as transcendentally foreign. Its propensity for novelty seems collusive with the fluidity of signifiers critiqued by Luciana Parisi in “Automate Sex: Xenofeminism, Hyperstition and Alienation,” Futures and Fictions, ed.

Simon O'Sullivan et al. (Repeater Books, 2017). For Shildrick's critique of domesticating the alien, see "Monstrosity, Desire and Death: Margrit Shildrick and Kateřina Kolářová in Conversation," Multilogues on the Now, lecture at FAMU, Prague (16 May 2019), https://artalk.cz/2019/05/11/16-5-2019-monstrozita-touha-a-smrt-rozhovor-mezi-margrit-shildrick-a-katerinou-kolarovou/.
32. Helen Hester, "Promethean Labors and Domestic Realism," e-flux (September 2017), accessed 3 January 2022, https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/artificial-labor/140680/promethean-labors-and-domestic-realism/.
33. The recent asymmetries along gender and racial lines as uncovered by the Covid-19 pandemic further show the task of making society's health standards all the more universal and fair. See Alessandra Mezzadri. "A crisis like no other: social reproduction and the regeneration of capitalist life during the COVID-19 pandemic," Developing Economics, (20 April 2020), accessed 15 January 2022, https://developingeconomics.org/2020/04/20/a-crisis-like-no-other-social-reproduction-and-the-regeneration-of-capitalist-life-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/.
34. Diann Bauer, "Alienation, Freedom, and the Synthetic How," Angelaki, vol. 24, no. 1 (2019).
35. Goh, "Appropriating the Alien."
36. Luciana Parisi, "Xeno-Patterning: Predictive Intuition and Automated Patterning," Angelaki, vol. 49 (2019).
37. Parisi, "Xeno-patterning," 83.
38. Amy Ireland, "Alien Rhythms," Litteraria Pragensia, vol. 29, no. 58 (December 2019), 64.
39. Parisi, "Xeno-Patterning."
40. Jacques Derrida, Of Hospitality (Stanford University Press, 2000), 29. Derrida gave the lecture which would later become published as his "Of Hospitality" just a year after Land wrote one of his most-often cited essays "Meltdown" (1995), and the same year Land write "zIIgothIc–==X=coDA==–(CookIng–lobsteRs– wIth–jAke–AnD–DInos)" (1996) both of which navigated Land's trajectory of "gothic" insulation.
41. Cuboniks, 0x14.
42. Avanessian interprets the xeno in its futurist proclivities through employing the term "hyperstition," or the "science of self-fulfilling prophecies" as Nick Land defined it. However, Avanessian wrests the xeno from a xenophobic mentality by integrating it within his project of "xenofuturism," which he defines as "futurisms embracing otherness and difference," see Ondřej Trhoň, "Armen Avanessian's farewell to Linear Times," Rajón – Art and Future, no. 6 (2020), 4.

the procedural mode

intersectionality: from figure to system

Throughout the 1970s and 80s, it was becoming increasingly apparent that second-wave feminism was addressing only a very limited spectrum of people. The fact that its movements in theory mostly reflected the subjectivity of a white, western, middle-class woman was becoming more apparent and prompted pressing questions about the systemic distribution of privilege and entitlement not only in wider society but also within the movement itself. Such a self-critique was importantly voiced from the movement's own margins. American second-wave feminism came to develop a reflexive consciousness of its selective sensing which pointed out its own limited spectrum of subjectivity. It thus came to grudgingly reflect (or, as Donna Haraway notes, was "forced kicking and screaming to notice")[1] the life worlds of non-white, gender non-binary or otherwise marginalized and variosuly discriminated subjects. This inching towards developing a systemic critique of the relationship between markedness, identity, and power constituted the first stirrings of intersectional feminism.

The concept of 'intersectionality' was most eloquently framed in Kimberlé Crenshaw's 1991 paper "Mapping the Margins: Identity, Politics and Violence Against Women of Color,"[2] which identified a fundamental moment in addressing the engagement between the figure of the marginalized subject and the state's legal apparatus. In the late 1980s and 1990s, intersectional feminism explored the relationship between social, gendered, racial, linguistic or cultural markedness and their resonances in the executive powers of the state and the workings of its judiciary systems. Intersectionality in this sense constituted a central method within the then-nascent feminisms of the third wave and opened the door to a feminist critical theory which would explore the lived experience of new subjectivities by mapping the concrete systemic logics which mark gendered, racial, economic, cultural, and other forms of inequality. Intersectionality in thsi sense irrupted into the social fold as a theory of power developed from the grassroots, which cast a new light on the infrastructural systemics of the legal apparatus (and others besides).

In her 1991 essay, Crenshaw writes:

> Over the last two decades, women have organized against the almost routine violence that shapes their lives. Drawing from the strength of shared experience, women have recognized that the political demands of millions speak more powerfully than the pleas of a few isolated voices.[3]

Here, Crenshaw is speaking of the preceding decades' civil rights and feminist struggles which were communally waged in a bid to resolve the pressing social issues of their contemporary USA. She however quickly moves to advocate beyond the nebulous identity politics of her own era, rather advocating systemic solutions to systemic threats:

> The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite – that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences. In the context of violence against women, this elision of difference in identity politics is problematic, fundamentally because the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class.[4]

Building on an engaged feminism which preceded her intersectional critique, Crenshaw saw that being identified as a 'woman' defines a particular vector of oppression from the side of the juridical apparatus and society at large, but also went further by showing that the markedness of being 'black', 'poor', or 'immigrant' ascribes still other oppressions onto the subject – oppressions which may be willfully invisible to those who are not marked as such but one which objectively resonate on the part of the legal apparatus (and innumerable others). Crenshaw showed oppression to be multifaceted, granular, and systemic in its workings and her work thus lays the groundwork for a nuanced and systemic critique which has often come to be leveraged in the struggle for socio-political reform.

Her original case study of the American legal system's interpellation of subjects on trial paved the way for a critical feminist theory which would account for the systemic asymmetries of oppression at the hand of the state apparatus and wider society. Intersectional critique thus

becomes a precursor to framing a multi-polar and patchworked *xenia* for the present day, questioning the very protocols by which and through which figures and communities are regarded as incrementally foreign. Where the straw-man villain of a pervasive and monolithic 'patriarchy' was being employed by many feminists as a seemingly catch-all signifier, one which struggled to join together very diverse initiatives and contexts against a specular, hegemonic great Other, Crenshaw's intersectional feminism came to constitute a turning point which opened the space for a structural, systemic, and potentially reformative critique, one which furthermore spoke doubly from the margins of actual legal practice.

One central aspect of intersectionality and the reflexive work of early third-wave feminism consists in the discovery of the explicit situatedness of subjectivity. It is here that feminist discourse in America and beyond started explicitly and consciously engaging with the actual systematics of oppression discovered in reflecting on the "intragroup differences" throughout the preceding two decades of civil rights movements. In its self-reflexive and socially-engaged method, intersectional feminism offered increasingly realistic solutions to real problems, insofar as these problems were shown to be material, political, and systemic, rather than exclusively ideological (much less metaphysical). Intersectional critique notably focused on the ways state apparatuses (as well as other corporate, educational, or medical institutions) come to account for those persons who are incrementally and variously interpellated as strangers and foreigners – in other words, it explores the *degree* and *quality* by which they are marked as threatening, precarious or non-privileged. Crenshaw's approach in "Mapping the Margins" amounted to a reformulation of subjectivity within the (explicitly American) legal apparatus, and it in that sense discovered and critiqued a deeper procedural logic to the formulation of otherness.

The procedural mode of comparative xenology then picks up on such intersectional critique in its focus on the procedural architectures which allow for the sensing, processing, accounting, and accommodation of otherness in the contemporary world. Such an analysis fundamentally analyzes the complex legal, technical, and infrastructural assemblages which circumscribe the workings of contemporary societies and facilitate the discriminative identification of others.

One fundamental insight gained from the previous chapter on xenofeminism is that any productive xenology must work at scale and must not shy away from the state-of-the-art in favor of taking the high road of transcendence, alibism or any retrograde assumption of purity. Following the ideas of technofeminism, this notably applies to the sphere of technology, as technologies mutate and develop with and through standing social needs. The critique thus aims to remain agile and able to speak the language of the complex technocracy in order to shape it towards increased response-ability and ethical conduct.

The figural/procedural split in Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality is today supported by updated technological conditions. In our era of unprecedented migration, subjects and bodies are reflected by the procedural powers of advanced sensing and computational apparatuses, such as the digital databases fed by biometric information, or the new abilities of machine vision and sensing in identifying persons of interest or migrants on the ground. Technology has also come to define the contemporary movement and networks of immigrants themselves, whose journeys and actions are often facilitated by platformed digital devices which enable increased communications and situational adaptability. Such a media critique of current systemic infrastructures reintegrates the procedurality of the xeno within its inherent ground of *xenia*, denoting the social protocols and procedures which allow for the sensing and processing of otherness. This integral vector shifts the signification of the xeno beyond the frequent fetishization of the figural self/other binary, and rather focuses on a reflexive accounting of the systems, institutions, and infrastructures (social, legal, technical, economic...) which underwrite such potential.

How might incrementally foreign subjects come to define their alienation through procedurality? And to what degree can we follow Julia Kristeva towards her ideal of "no longer that of welcoming the foreigner within a system that obliterates him [*sic*] but of promoting the togetherness of those foreigners that we all recognize ourselves to be"?[5] The procedural mode of *xenia* thus aims to reflect the blind spots which 'we' – as subjects and societies – have come to disregard; i.e. those social, technical or epistemic infrastructures which filter and reproduce foreignness and alienation at various degrees of visibility.

It must be stated that such a reformative endeavor always problematically remains complicit with what Audre Lorde has termed "the Master's Tools" – i.e. the systemic power structures which have historically served to shore up the status quo of various executive powers. But rather than developing towards exit and decoupling, the projects studied by comparative xenology are able to speak their language in order to work through them and beyond them. Such proactive engagement oftentimes defuses the paranoid mentality which automatically assumes supra-individual structures as inevitably complicit with repression – such "Tools" can rather become facilitators with their own particular dispositions and degrees of affordance.

In order to move beyond the simple reductionism of the conspiratorial mindset, which sees a problem of scale and transparency as a problem of political theology, it is necessary to construct a more nuanced, engaged and technically proficient epistemology. To follow the call of the xenofeminists (and Michel Foucault before them),[6] such a critique must remain "adamantly synthetic, unsatisfied by analysis alone," and must strive to "cultivate the exercise of positive freedom—freedom-to rather than simply freedom-from." The following section then asks how both "positive freedom," (i.e. freedom to), and "negative freedom (i.e. freedom from), might be cultivated not in spite of, but rather by means of distributed technical systems – and indeed, many contemporary projects which make recourse to the notion of xeno are heavily invested in questions of social automation, urbanism, architecture, artificial intelligence, big-data analysis, and other endeavors which work with or are native to the networked and automated infrastructural ground of the contemporary social fold.

One such project is xeno-architecture.

1. Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (New York: Routledge, 1991), 157.
2. Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Identity, Politics and Violence Against Women of Color,” Stanford Law Review, vol. 43, no. 6 (July 1991), 1241-1299.
3. Crenshaw, 1241.
4. Crenshaw, 1242.
5. Kristeva, Strangers to Ourselves, 2.
6. Jane Bennett quotes from Foucault’s “Confinement, Psychiatry, Prison” (p.209): “I’ve become rather irritated by an attitude, which for a long time was mine, too, and which I no longer subscribe to, which consists in saying: our problem is to denounce and criticize: let them get on with their legislation and reforms. That doesn’t seem to me like the right attitude.” Bennet, Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things, xv.
7. Laboria Cuboniks, “Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation,” laboriacuboniks.net (2014), 0x07, accessed 6 June 2023, http://www.laboriacuboniks.net/20150612-xf_layout_web.pdf.

xeno-architecture: the city of strangers

A trope which has traditionally manifested the procedural workings of the xeno has been that of the city – whether it is in the works of Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, Francois Lyotard or Fredric Jameson, writers and thinkers since the modern era have discussed and critiqued the alienation and ambivalence of the built, technical environment. This automated choreography and anonymity of the metropolis with its overlapping zones and time schedules, normative tempos and distribution of consumer products and affects begs question about alienation's relation to procedurality.[1] In the context of xenology, the trope of the city is discussed in the art and theory of neo-avantgarde artist Krzysztof Wodiczko (whose work has been analyzed at length in Part I), especially in his influential essay "Designing for the City of Strangers"[2] where he builds on the work of Sigmund Freud and Walter Benjamin to produce a theory of the globalist metropolis of the 1990s.

Wodiczko uses the contemporary politics of global migration as a springboard for questioning the position of the stranger within the era of rising globalism. Apart from addressing the position of the migrants, immigrants, and various precarious denizens living within the modern city in the figural sense, his theory also develops certain problems of the procedural context within which such strangeness is interpellated and enacted, affecting the habituated choreographies of a localized community:

> the state of being a stranger accumulates as experience with no form, no language, no expression, and no right to be communicated [...] This strange-ness is a strangely familiar, secret, and uncanny condition that we all share and that, when expressed in the ideological caves of our subjectivity, can sometimes explode in the face of an actual stranger.[3]

Wodiczko's theory of alienation is in this sense a theory of enunciation which works through the (in)ability to communicate particular aspects of strangeness and alienation through language. Drawing on the work of Sigmund Freud and Julia Kristeva, he asserts that the encounter with the figural stranger triggers the repressed

(that "familiar, secret, and uncanny condition") within the observing self.

Although Wodiczko's theory of strangeness is here approached as a personal and individual experience of linguistic foreclosure, his assumption of the city as an envelope within which the question of strangeness is enacted offers a form of critique which tends towards the level of social procedurality. It is in this semiotic landscape that the dispositions of architecture, law and custom provide the best vantage point for observing the relationship between an incrementally strange figure and its environment. The procedural level in this sense elicits a particular response which must be accounted for not only on the level of the figural, but also by means of a transversal analysis of the systems,[4] architectures, and multi-actor constructs which make up the habituated automations of the technical milieu.

This shift from the figural to the procedural strange will be discussed particularly through questioning this affect of 'the uncanny,' and it will be the contention of this section that the (re)surfacing of unconscious automation is relevant not only on the level of the figural, but also within the procedural mode – such an affect will be defined as the 'procedural uncanny.'[5]

In the classical sense of the term, the figural *xenos* always brings with them the concept of a not-here, a space beyond the procedural automation of social choreographies as they exist for a given community in the here and now. The foreigner brings with them a sense of an 'outside' which resonates not only in the sense of space (as in the classical sense of a stranger encroaching from a foreign land) but simultaneously triggers the implicit, abstract relativization of culture as a set of given social practices. The stranger in this sense is not only a harbinger of a *particular* otherness, but also of *otherness as such*, as an abstractum – the not-one who relativizes the givenness of any latent automation and shows the inherent contingency of the processes shoring up the social unconscious. As Julia Kristeva writes, this leads to the explicit realization that the "Uncanny, foreignness is within us: we are our own foreigners, we are divided."[6] Kristeva's etymological analysis makes the connection between the xenos and the uncanny explicit: "what in English is *uncanny*, [...] the Greeks quite simply call *xenos*, 'foreign'."[7]

Freud adds an explicit temporal dimension, as for him the uncanny denotes the affect of encountering the repressed,[8] i.e. something which had been consciously reflected by the subject at some point in the past, but which has since become latent and unconscious. This is the source of the general anxiety of the xenos – it makes what has been repressed strange *again*. Freud writes: "some new things are frightening but not by any means at all. Something has to be added to what is novel and unfamiliar to make it uncanny," and this 'something' he identifies with the subject's previously repressed knowledge:

> anxiety can be shown to come from something repressed which recurs. This class of morbid anxiety would then be no other than what is uncanny, irrespective of whether it originally aroused dread or some other affect. [...] if this is indeed the secret nature of the uncanny, we can understand why the usage of speech has extended das Heimliche into its opposite das Unheimliche; for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old—established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression.[9]

The particular example explored by Freud and Jentsch is from E. T. A. Hoffman's story "The Sandman" where, Freud argues, the unheimliche is manifest in three aspects: the explicit trope of doubling, the symbolism of the eyes and their absence (which for Freud indexes an Oedipal fear of castration), and finally the phenomenon of inanimate objects seeming animate. As writes Mark Fisher in his *The Weird and the Eerie*, Freud describes the uncanny by providing examples of "doubles, mechanical entities that appear human, prostheses" which "call up a certain kind of disquiet," but Fisher is quick to add that Freud's ultimate assertion that the unheimliche's entire breadth of affect "can be reduced to castration anxiety – is [...] disappointing."[10]

But there is one particular reading which Freud offers in his analysis of the uncanny which is not identical to the effect of doubling, prostheses or animating the inanimate, and which is central to the xenological analysis of procedurality: Freud draws on Jentsch's perception that the "effect produced by epileptic fits" is another example of the uncanny, as it serves to "arouse in the onlooker

vague notions of automatic – mechanical – processes that may lie hidden behind the familiar image of a living person."[11] At the figural level of the body – which is the proper site of psychoanalytic pathology as explored by Freud – the epileptic seizure manifests as strange and foreign in the exposition of the body's own internal dispositions, which are furthermore made conscious *at the precise moment of their breakdown*. It is this affect of the surfacing of the procedural repressed which constitutes the 'procedural uncanny.' But this "effect" which excites the realization that there are "automatic mechanical processes" at work indicates a procedural mode of alienation which can also be expanded beyond the figural register.

The assertion of the position of the infrastructural unconscious furthermore goes back to Schelling's original definition of the uncanny as "something that should have remained hidden and has come into the open,"[12] and Kristeva comments on this particular passage as follows: "[...] therefore, that which *is* strangely uncanny would be that which was (the past tense is important) familiar and, under certain conditions (which ones?), emerges."[13] To answer Kristeva's question, we can say that the present automation of infrastructures comes into the social conscious at the moment of their breakdown – for example, society becomes conscious of an underfunded health sector when it becomes overstressed, it becomes aware of the power grid once it goes off, 'we' only become aware of utilities once they stop streaming into our home... Such a breakdown then needn't be understood in a strictly psychoanalytic or physiological sense but can rather be extrapolated as the encounter with a general systemic pathology of cascading deterioration, one which is pertinent just as much to the phenomenology of the body as to technical environments and social systems.

It is this becoming conscious of what had been repressed that comprises an uncanny aspect to the mutations and developments of homeostatic systems, and which appears in the creaking of the scaffolding of our life-worlds we so often prefer to disregard, if only for peace of mind. The procedural uncanny is then this experience of alienation precipitated by the liminal breakdown of procedural homeostasis. We can say that the figure of the polis as a procedural performance – the seemingly natural 'body politic,' the idea of the state as machine, but also the material infrastructures which underpin them – becomes once again aware of its repressed

automation, and this affect constitutes the procedural uncanny.

To return to the xenological context, we can say that the city becomes the most emblematic site for the experiencing of the procedural uncanny, insofar as the relationship between individuals and the anthropogenic systems and infrastructures (and their deterioration) is very dense. Wodiczko explicitly references the procedural protocol of otherness in his understanding of the city as a site of *xenia* – a procedural envelope which defines, comprehends and interpellates the xenos, and explicitly explores the blind spots of such a latent ground throughout his artwork and theory, most importantly in *Xenology: Immigrant Instruments*, as well as in the mentioned essay "Designing for the City of Strangers," and the *Homeless Vehicles* and *Critical Vehicles* series.

A central and poignant assertion of Wodiczko's 1997 essay is that, unlike immigrants of the past, the "new refugees enter cities that are already fully built, with their architectural, ideological, and monumental theaters in place."[14] For Wodiczko, the question of the foreigner-as-figure then tends towards a systemic analysis which takes into account the lived environment of urban life and its accreted choreography of social interaction, while the politics of his avant-garde project are found in an agonist form of democracy which would become response-able to those newly arrived in the cities:

> It is up to these newcomers [...] to transform and unbuild the cities by inserting their presence, performances, and their histories into the collective memories and democratic discourses of the city itself.[15]

Wodiczko's essay aims to formulate a general brief for the "City of the Vanquished" which might work against the manifest history of the victors in urban space. Such a constructive project develops from the initial ungrounding of the accreted systems of urban habitation and regards them as mutable and open to input. It thereby prompts awareness and sensitivity to the weighted legacy systems which afford certain actions and interactions while limiting others – and although such structures are certainly architectural, they are equally infrastructural, social, and epistemic. It is this expansion of the notion of architecture which supports his xenological position.

And one particular contemporary xenoproject similarly questions the various procedural architectures which come to define our contemporary world – xeno-architecture.[16] The xeno-architecture project developed from its original formulation of Armen Avanessian and Markus Miessen offered in their publication *Crossbenching*. There, they propose "a xeno-architecture of knowing"[17] as a new epistemology – a rational and practical method of performed knowledge which would also be poised to speculatively develop the potentialities inherent in currently existing architectures. The subsequent project *Perhaps It Is High Time for a Xeno-Architecture to Match* consisted of publishing a series of "estafette conversations with philosophers, poets, experts in the field of human rights and designers"[18] which took place over the course of 2017, and it was accompanied by a performative event in Kaaitheater in Brussels in April of that year. The multilogues developed from it were subsequently published by Sternberg Press in 2018.[19]

According to organizer and filmmaker Lietje Bauwens, the project developed from the dissatisfaction with the "conceptual stagnation and fundamental miscommunication between on the one side a Critical attitude, with a capital C, being an end-in-itself, and on the other side a more and more complex, insecure, contingent (digital) world."[20] Although Bauwens considers the artistic event at the Kaaitheater to have partly failed, consisting of a mere eclectic exercise in "hyper-chaos," she considers the publication's polylogues – featuring eminent thinkers such as Patricia Reed, Benjamin Bratton, Armen Avanessian, Anke Hennig, Luciana Parisi and others – to have succeeded in yielding a practical "tool-box" for exploring the xeno-potentialities of architecture.

The 'xeno' consistently appears as a central trope throughout the conversations, where it is leveraged as a critical concept, as well as a particular curatorial methodology, for exploring and formulating the procedural operations of diverse architectures (epistemological, computational, and material) at various scales. It in this sense provides a fulcrum from which to explore some of these architectures' capacity for mutability, modularity and productive revision. The conversations included in the publication can be philosophically leveraged to assess the position of procedurality in the study of the xeno, particularly in the context of Wodiczko's xenology and his socio-aesthetic analysis of "cities that are already fully built": It is significant that the entire *Perhaps It Is*

High Time for a Xeno-Architecture to Match project was prompted by an analysis of the intersection between architecture and politics, with the urbanist history of the city of Brussels providing the project's central starting point.[21]

Bauwens writes that for her and her curatorial team, "xeno-architecture" develops from

> a long tradition of social engagement, of which resistance to urban developments of the sixties and seventies is emblematic. In response to the dramatic mutilation of entire neighborhoods in the name of modernization and profit – a phenomenon known as Brusselization – citizens, architects, artists, cultural workers, academics and the like called for the right to make decisions about their city and for a politics that emphasizes particularities – a city garden to halt climate change or a communal playground to overcome segregation.[22]

But Bauwens is quick to add that "These merely local and physical approaches [i.e. the city garden and communal playground] are incapable of dealing with the complex and planetary challenges the world faces today." This statement then comes as an invitation to think at scale and address the position of the vast, distributed systems and their real effects.

In the context of the xeno, the necessity to think alienation at scale applies not only to discussions about the climate, pollution, or biodiversity, but also to the social protocols of hospitality which comprise a central aspect of the political dimension of the xeno. Developing Wodiczko's project of avant-garde hacking of a given space's procedural syntax (which he based in his particular idiom of Relational art and cosmopolitanism), xeno-architecture posits solutions at scales which move beyond the figural concept of the 'foreigner-as-alien' and expand alienation as a generally distributed feature of procedural architectures and anthropogenic systems. It thus aims to develop a systemic approach working with a new and updated toolbox for the 21st century and provides a great case study for exploring the procedural mode of the xeno today.

Over the course of the multilog, one seminal conversation transpired between Victoria Ivanova and Benjamin Bratton, in which both question the position of contemporary

architectures for sensing, databasing and control within the context of governmentality. Picking up on Patricia Reed's concept of "xeno-politics" and its role in formulating "a new geopolitics,"[23] Ivanova calls for mapping and questioning the "xeno-architectures that are already in place [...] that by virtue of whatever short-sightedness, we are simply not detecting."[24]

This approach is directly analogous to the excavation of the already-existing infrastructures functioning below the threshold of conscious reflection but which are nonetheless determinative of lived experiences, and which often become consciously uncanny precisely at the moment of their breakdown. Developing the political line of thought which underpins the xeno-architecture project, Ivanova speak about the new "xeno-politics" as a force which makes us "rethink the naturalization of institutional arrangements that the current legal system relies on."[25]

Xeno-architecture is thus a call to excavate and shape the procedural unconscious which determines the affordances of our lifeworlds, and provides a methodology for making latent architectures more conscious, palpable and ultimately softer, more responsive, and adaptive. This question of social adaptability, accommodation and hospitality comes to the fore most pressingly in the current 'century of the migrant,' where the previously foreign has become all the more proximate.

1. 'Procedurality' is here taken from the work of Ian Bogost, and denotes a range of possibility which is largely set, iterative and may determines possibilities of action in a given scape.
2. Wodiczko, "City of Strangers," Critical Vehicles: Writings, Projects, Interviews (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999), 4-15.
3. Wodiczko, 9.
4. For the definition of transversality, see Félix Guattari, Psychoanalysis and Transversality: Texts and Interviews 1955–1971 (Semiotext(e), 2005); Félix Guattari, The Three Ecologies (The Athlone Press, 2000).
5. As a preliminary note on the close connection with the affective registers of automation and procedurality, it bears repeating that the phenomenon of uncanniness in contemporary anglophone use is often connected to the classical metaphor of the "uncanny valley" – a model case in which an android is perceived as frightening if its anthropomorphic features increasingly tend towards the fidelity of the human 'original.' See Masahiro Mori, "The Uncanny Valley: The Original Essay by Masahiro Mori," IEEE Spectrum (12 June 2012), accessed 26 June 2023, https://web.ics.purdue.edu/~drkelly/MoriTheUncannyValley1970.pdf.
6. Kristeva, Strangers to Ourselves, 181.
7. Kristeva, Strangers to Ourselves, 191.
8. Originally deriving from Freud's analysis of the work of psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch, the semiotics of the uncanny are fundamentally bi-valent: Freud famously makes the point that in the original German the terms heimliche (familiar) and unheimliche (unfamiliar) have semantically converged to signify the same sense of dread and anxiety. Freud dedicates the first part of his essay "On the Uncanny" to exploring this paradoxical convergence of meaning and its intrinsic semantic ambivalence. See Ernst Jentsch, "On the Psychology of the Uncanny (1906)," Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities, vol. 2 (1997), 7–16.
9. Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in The Uncanny (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 123-162.
10. Fisher, The Weird and the Eerie (London: Repeater Books, 2016), 9. Fisher, one of the most influential philosophers to have come out of the program of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit, discusses in this work the cultural manifestations and affects of the 'weird' and the 'eerie' and dedicates some thought to their relation with the Freudian unheimlich. Fisher writes: "The folding of the weird and the eerie into the unheimlich is symptomatic of a secular retreat from the outside," (10) and the discussion of the "hijacking" of the xeno by Land and his cyberphilosophy constructs the unheimlich as a social fold which is grounded by the 'home' as a "retreat from the outside" which is, purportedly, inhabited by the weird and the eerie.

11. Freud, 135.
12. Freud, 148.
13. Kristeva, Strangers to Ourselves, 183.
14. Wodiczko, 7.
15. Wodiczko, 7.
16. Although the habitual way of using the xeno is as a brace with a head noun, i.e. no hyphen, the xeno-architecture project has been consistently labeled with the hyphen, which I keep here.
17. Markus Miessen, Crossbenching (Sternberg Press, 2017).
18. Bauwens, "Accounting for Xeno (How) Can Speculative Knowledge Productions Actually Produce New Knowledges," in The Future of the New: Artistic Innovation in Times of Social Acceleration, ed. Thijs Lijster (Valiz, 2018), 102.
19. L. Bauwens, W. De Raeve, A. Haddad, "Preface," in Perhaps We Need a Xeno-Architecture to Match (Sternberg Press, 2018), 6.
20. Bauwens, "Accounting for Xeno," 103.
21. Bauwens, "Accounting for Xeno," 102.
22. Bauwens, "Accounting for Xeno," 103.
23. L. Bauwens, W. De Raeve, A. Haddad, et al., Perhaps We Need a Xeno-Architecture to Match, 62.
24. L. Bauwens, W. De Raeve, A. Haddad, et al., Perhaps We Need a Xeno-Architecture to Match, 103.
25. L. Bauwens, W. De Raeve, A. Haddad, et al., Perhaps We Need a Xeno-Architecture to Match, 163.

In his book *The Figure of the Migrant*, Thomas Nail calls the 21st century the "century of the migrant," noting that there are currently over 1 billion displaced people in the world and that "Climate change in particular may cause international migration to double over the next forty years."[1] Social uprooting and displacement and the alienation associated with it have become a pervasive and defining feature of today's cultural zeitgeist and are set to continue defining planetary "kinetics" and politics for years to come. It has become one of the central conditions determining the formation of subjectivity today, with Nail commenting that "we are all becoming migrants."

In the context of the discussion on xeno-architecture, curator Victoria Ivanova says that there is "an urgency to rethink the foundational principles of citizenship and opportunity [within] the emergence of new techno-architectural systems."[2] Ivanova's xeno-politics here attempt to negotiate a new form of subjectivity, one which might take stock of the dynamic and changing ontology of movement, belonging, production, and reproduction. She is quick to specify that such new systems must however avoid the caveat of mere economic universalism which would regard the migrant body solely as a normatively determined locus of economic activity and productivity. As a possible answer to this problem, she calls for the conceptualization of "xeno-citizenship."

Such a subjectivity would draw on a new form of universal humanity as existing beyond the citizenships derived from the classical rights of *jus soli* (based on birth in a particular place) and *jus sanguinis* (based on being born to particular parents/subjects). It would thus aim to reflect the migrating body beyond its particular ethnic or national identity markers, while at the same time making it legible as a site of particular rights and responsibilities. In an era when refugee status is still not provided to migrants expelled from their home by ecological crisis or degradation,[3] and where women and children often flee wars without the promise of significantly contributing to the GDP of a destination state, the question of xeno-citizenship becomes all the more pressing. The procedural mode of comparative xenology thus aims to philosophically frame exactly those mechanisms of identification, categorization, and accommodation which

might account for the procedural strange at scale within a robust ethical framework, and which may already be contained in contemporary xenoarchitectures. This framework finds its calling in the cultivation of an alienated kinship, mutualist thriving, and non-predatory patterns and practices. In other words, there is no xenoarchitecture without xenohospitality[4] and vice-versa.

In her 2018 monograph *Xenofeminism,* Helen Hester argues that "we should look to foster a form of mutational politics" as a form of "xeno-hospitality"[5] – a "reorientation away from reproductive futurity and towards various models of kinship and xeno-solidarity" which might "actually encourage a deeper hospitality towards the Other [in] an act of solidarity with new arrivals of all kinds (from migrants, to new caregivers, to the very young)."[6] Hester's xenohospitality project certainly cuts through a vast segment of social practice, but it engages with difference through a social and ethical grounding, constructing the concept of hospitality as a systemic and infrastructural project.

Hester further develops the concept of xenohospitality in her essay Sapience and Care, where she fundamentally defines this mode of sociality as an inherent human trait, an evolutionary cultural legacy and substrate to humanity's evolutionary becoming – albeit always shaped by the particular conditions of a people's environment and culture, the difficult task of caring for the newborn, engagaing with the newly arrived or various forms of kin and strangers has been an evolutionary feature of the human species. Putting such a propensity to care in proper focus reintegrates the question of hospitality as a fundamental binding point of the social fabric.

Hester's xeno-hospitality then calls for a form of artificial hospitality which would be progressive in its particulars while at the same time based in the general realization of the procedural evolution of hospitality which remains existent in the practice of automation and maintenance. It is here that Hester's 'xeno' explicitly intercedes in Land's accelerationist systemics by leveraging the social sphere and reflecting the integral enmeshment of alienation and the xeno with the lived practice of social engagement.

Hester develops such xenopolitics in following Reza Negarestani's advocation to "reconstruct" inhuman rationality "by dissociating human significance from human glory."[7] Such an approach provides the groundwork for a 'strategic anthropocentrism' (Braidotti) which keeps in

view the responsibility of humanity to its own self-construction in which the figure of the human is constantly receding, but never wholly evacuated. Following Negarestani (whose work will be further discussed in the following chapter on the inhuman) reasoning and rationality ought to be understood as "a normative designation which is specified by entitlements and the responsibilities they bring about."[8] Such ideas and ideals are, in other words, an issue of negotiating the responsibilities of the human from itself to itself and to others. It is in the capacity for self-reflection and self-formation – i.e. sapience and rationality – that Hester finds the propensity to explore the artificiality of the concept of 'the human.' In its ability to sense and be sensitive, such a form of human subjecthood is integrally (although not exclusively) developed as a knot of social relations, and xenohospitality in this sense provides a general method.

When Hester writes that "sapience and care are fundamentally entangled from the get-go,"[9] the artificiality of reason and the ethical axiom of human hospitality converge in 'response-ability' – a neologism coined by Donna Haraway which invokes the ability to be affected in an asymmetrical exchange. It brings together a responsivity to the margins and to otherness, as well as assuming an integral responsibility which such an awareness provides. Hester writes: "having the ability to engage in complex forms of abstract reasoning brings with it a particular kind of response-ability – one which reaches beyond the immediate realm of the same and into the *xeno*."[10] The ability to be affected and remain responsive to others as well as to one's negotiated and incrementally alienated self-image becomes a seminal vehicle for a more general xeno-politics as voiced by Ivanova. Xenohospitality thus comes to frame an open ethical practice in which mutation and change comprise a necessary choreography inherent in any project of socially-engaged adaptation.

Hester explicitly calls for such a form of hospitality in the face of advancing climate change and the social challenges brought about by accelerating migration and displacement. In the call for a pragmatic ethics of repurposing and maintaining a resilient social and systemic culture of caregiving, Hester's shift away from the humdrum automation of "reproductive futurity" is then predicated on the assumption of the strange and alien as an integral vector of difference and change. Such a vector must not be approached merely as a celebration of figural

individuality, but must be understood systemically. The sensing and reflection of the life worlds of those displaced is equally not only a question of accommodating the refugee, migrant, or newborn as *figures* of migration, but is also a question of the scalability and capacity of the processing systems, their protocols of interpellation and the viability of their habituated *procedural* logic. As example, we see that during periods of infrastructural shock – such as during the last migration crisis from Ukraine in the Spring of 2022 on account of the invasion by Russian armies, which strained the social and health systems of countries in the CEE region and elsewhere – the contours and habituated operations of social complexes become all the more visible and subject to wider political debate. The fact that these social, economic and state networks – such as education facilities, healthcare, or social welfare – come to be consciously reflected in society often makes their manifestations uncanny for those who have become de-habituated to consciously reflecting them: as suddenly de-automated systems straining under stress, they provide insight into their position and functioning, and open debate on the tenability of their positions.

The procedural aspect of xenohospitality in this regard tends towards addressing the domestication of otherness at scale and armed with the proper language to assess its procedural operations. Such a necessary update to socio-political discourse aims to provide an antidote to the reductive bigotry of nativist politics which mobilize various fascist binaries of inside/outside, self/other, us/them...

Paranoid reproductive politics which serve to paralyze infrastructural discernment and endlessly fetishize the ever-slipping event horizon of the abject can be (and have been) mobilized as a politics of perpetual crisis, and they are in this sense positioned as a discursive antithesis to the theory and practice of xenohospitality. Conscious, shared (and thus socially negotiated) projects of cognitive mapping provide the necessary toolbox for grappling with the ontology of accreted infrastructures. This acceleration of ethical epistemologies is an integral aspect of xeno-hospitality. The willingness to engage with the circuitry and systemics of contemporary actors should then function as a form of social inoculation, ideally preventing their hijacking by a fetishized uncanny masking their real political stasis as an imaginary onrush of transformation.

In a world of post-truth, fake news, militarized info-wars, and fascist imaginaries permeating political praxis, the practice of xenohospitality must not become bogged down in intellectual inertia and shocked awe but must rather persist not in spite of such manipulative hijackings and obfuscations but because of them. The procedural uncanny, here experienced as the excavation of automated workings which were heretofore repressed, is a particular moment to be overcome. With the liminal moment of its overcoming, it provides a vector which discovers the strange in systems which had heretofore seemed dense, set and homeostatic. The realization that all sociality is artificial also assumes the development of a rational discourse about it. Anything less carries the threat of breeding not aliens, but monsters.

In the context of comparative xenology, the procedural mode particularly builds on Krzysztof Wodiczko's invocation of Walter Benjamin's "City of Victors"[11] which operates (quoting Mosès and Wiskind) as a past "transmitted to us through a hermeneutical tradition that selects events, preserving some and rejecting others, at times determining their interpretation."[12] Developing this approach beyond the ideology of text, this mode of xenological analysis attempts to see the procedural dispositions inherent in automated operations and questions the dynamics of accretion of power relations within public space. Its focus lays in analyzing the procedurality of legacy systems in their particular structural dispositions, affordances and political motives.

There is a play of temporality here, insofar as the sedimentation of social choreographies can be critically mapped by analyzing their sedimented operations as they have developed historically in time. But in contrast to the impulse of a Critical (capital C) tradition to merely critique via a theoretical apparatus, comparative xenology aims to not only analyze but actively shape the procedural dispositions of the "master's tools" as they exist in the here and now. Following the assertion of xenofeminism that the master's tools in fact can tear down the master's house (as Lucca Fraser says, "How can they not?"),[13] it therefore shifts the critique from a classically Critical one to one which is more attuned particular cases and the means at hand present for the rational hacking and repurposing of standing legacy systems. Here, criticality becomes a means rather than an end in itself.

Two concepts which are fundamental for the construction of such an analysis are 'disposition' and 'affordance'. Disposition comprises the innate tendencies and capabilities which a system can be realistically subjected to, while affordance denotes the particular and speculative potentialities of use and their possible effects on the world, whether inherent in the system as a whole or in its individual parts. Architect and theorist Keller Easterling speaks of disposition in relation to her notion of "media design," defining it as "the agency or potential immanent in a relationship [...] the disposition of any organization makes some things possible and some things impossible."[14] The immanence of such agency lies in the non-trivial sympoiesis (a 'making-with') of its constitutive agents: as Easterling presents in her project of 'medium design', it is the very organization of things, not the things in themselves, that create propensity for particular effect. In her assertion that medium design "looks beyond object to matrix,"[15] she simultaneously calls to update critical structures in order to creatively hack these "protocols of interplay."[16]

One fundamental aspect of this gesture is that Easterling expands the notion of 'medium' beyond the system of individualized gadgets or hardware as well as its associations with information theory and its cybernetic protocol of sender, channel and receiver; she rather understands the medium as an environment. She regards the 'medium' as denoting the very ground of interaction – a medium understood in this sense reclaims its meaning as "a condition or environment in which something may function or flourish;"[17] much like the medium for sound waves is air and atmosphere, or a salt-water habitat a medium for Atlantic mackerel. A medium thus constitutes a fold with its own particular dispositions for the occurrence of various events, processes and procedures.

Here we see the crux of the shift in the understanding of urban legacy systems from Wodiczko to the more contemporary 'medium design' of Easterling – where Wodiczko was largely preoccupied with deconstructing the inherited, ideological and oftentimes textual "history of the victors" as manifest within the city ("the City of Victors"), Easterling is more preoccupied with the methods by which the medium, seen as a procedural assemblage of relations, can be utilized, performed and ultimately mutated by praxis. It is notable that Wodiczko's art practice (such as the *Critical Vehicles* series or *Xenology:*

Immigrant Instruments) quite explicitly worked with notions of dispositions and affordance, but always essentially focused on the flow and choreography of the nomad figure within metropolitan systems, and his theoretical analyses remained rooted in a different canon from that of contemporary architecture and design.

In the particular context of Critique, many thinkers of the materialist and speculative turns have worked to develop a pragmatic praxis beyond what Vilém Flusser has called "textolatry"[18] – i.e. "[a] pure adherence to a theory as the only path toward sufficiently sharp critique."[19] Here, we can perhaps allude to artist and curator Irit Rogoff's invocation of the recent shift from the reproduction of "inherited knowledges" to the observation of contemporary "conditions"[20] – such a shift provides a blueprint for speculative practice which is critical insofar as it questions the workings of the standing procedural choreographies of social systemics, but is also speculative in its dedication to productive outcomes. It provides a new underlying logic for the "City of the Vanquished" which may become a positive trope in its engagement with questions of sociality and may work beyond a mere Critical reflex predicated on ressentiment and complacency.

In her notion of "medium design," Easterling similarly attempts to move beyond the insipid presence of "the binary and the loop," which she considers to be reductive conceptual architectures existing in anxious tension with a reality which everywhere exceeds them. She then develops her notion of medium design to instead cultivate a logic of procedural mutation which might look beyond the habituated schematics of our current epistemologies, formulating a systemic critique which would approach the medium on its own terms.

In the language of Easterling, we can say that a medium provides a diverse range of affordances which are based in its particular dispositions – such dispositions are certainly determined by socio-technical legacy systems, each with their particular histories attached, but they are also shown to be, to that very same degree, contingent and open to exaptation, i.e. those uses which were heretofore barred, latent or unintended. The unravelling of automated operations exposes their original procedural workings but also assumes a simultaneous opening towards the forms of procedurality which were previously alien to them.

1. Nail, The Figure of the Migrant, 1. Also see Jon Henley, "Climate crisis could displace 1.2bn people by 2050, report warns," The Guardian (9 September 2020), accessed 8 June 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/sep/09/climate-crisis-could-displace-12bn-people-by-2050-report-warns; T. J. Demos, The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis (Duke University Press, 2013).
2. L. Bauwens, W. De Raeve, A. Haddad, et al., Perhaps We Need a Xeno-Architecture to Match, 157.
3. On the liminal position of climate refugees, see for example European Parliament, "The Concept of Climate Refugee: Towards a Possible Definition," europa.eu (October 2021), accessed 27 June 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/698753/EPRS_BRI(2021)698753_EN.pdf.
4. Hester, 64.
5. Hester, Xenofeminism, 4.
6. Hester, Xenofeminism, 62.
7. Reza Negarestani, "Labor of the Inhuman Part II: The Inhuman," e-flux no. 53 (March 2014), accessed 10 June 2023, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/53/59893/the-labor-of-the-inhuman-part-ii-the-inhuman/.
8. Negarestani, "Labor of the Inhuman Part II: The Inhuman."
9. Helen Hester, "Sapience + Care: Reason and Responsibility in Posthuman Politics," Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities, vol. 24, no. 1 (2019), 74.
10. Helen Hester, "Sapience + Care," 74. Here, Hester invokes the concept of 'response-ability' of Donna Haraway, which denotes simultaneously an openness to affect and an ethical grounding. Ethical (not necessarily emotional) affectability thus comprehends an integral level of human sociality in general, and it is this deep sociality which comparative xenology aims to frame and navigate.
11. Wodiczko, 4.
12. Stéphane Mosès and Ora Wiskind, "The Theological-Political Model of History in the Thought of Walter Benjamin," History and Memory, vol. 1, no. 2 (Fall – Winter, 1989), 11.
13. Lucca Fraser, "Xenofeminism and New Tactics for the Left," interview by Merray Gerges, Canadian Art (6 February 2017), accessed 28 June 2023, https://canadianart.ca/interviews/xenofeminism/.
14. Keller Easterling, Medium Design: Knowing How to Work on the World (Verso, 2021), ix; invoking Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Easterling gives the example of a skipper on the Mississippi who is able to read the disposition of the water as an index to the sub-surface objects and obstacles, allowing them to navigate the ship safely.
15. Easterling, Medium Design, x.
16. Easterling, Medium Design, 10.
17. 'medium,' Merriam-Webster dictionary (2023), accessed 10 June 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/medium.

18. Vilém Flusser, Towards a Theory of Photography (Reaktion Books, 2000), 12.
19. Easterling, Medium Design, 5.
20. Irit Rogoff, “Common Research,” New Alphabet School (9 Sept. 2022), accessed 16 September 2022, https://newalphabetschool.hkw.de/common-research/index.html.

the inhuman mode

Comparative xenology understands the concept of 'the inhuman' as rooted in a form of social rationality. The inhuman in this sense remains in dynamic tension with the concept of 'the human,' which it shows to be mutable and subject to constant revision while never becoming wholly evacuated. Comparative xenology then understands the inhuman as a vehicle for the construction of social alterity and positive alienation. Such a definition of 'the inhuman' aims to construct a different meaning from its usual connotations as: 1) a marker of an ethical value judgement – as we often see in common use as denoting something heinous or ethically abominable – or alternately as 2) denoting a transcendent sphere which remains radically foreclosed to the human experience – as we, for example, see in certain strands of contemporary ecological discourse.

As a point of introduction, we can say that philosophical inhumanism has been preoccupied with phenomena which exceed the traditional tropes and methods of humanist discourse, for example focusing rather on the natural and geological world, the ontology of things-in-themselves, and the exploration of materialist ontologies. This object-oriented view of the inhuman constructs certain aspects of the world as a material reality existing orthogonally to human presence and non-presence. A resurgence of such a view has recently been developed by thinkers of speculative realism such as Quentin Meillassoux, Graham Harman, Ian Bogost, or Ray Brassier, and we can generally say these thinkers agree that reality is not structured 'for us,' i.e. 'humanity,' but remains an entity with its own contingent material history, direction, and volition. And that it furthermore remains integrally inaccessible.

Quentin Meillassoux has, for example, called the superhuman plane the realm of 'The Great Outdoors,'[1] within which the human control systems supported by humanity's cultural self-image are nested. Such reality then naturally needn't be in direct correlation with the human and its particular, often narcissistic ,view on the material world. Speculative Realism calls this imaginary, specular assumption of the congruency of the human view with the outside material reality "correlationism," and it radically distances itself from any such anthropocentric tendencies, rather assuming that the world needn't be correlative to

the human but that it has an existence beyond the register of human phenomenology. Black holes, the life cycles of the suns and stars, the geological core and mantel of the Earth – all these are seen as examples of the material reality which lays beyond the human self-image and with which the human engages on asymmetric terms.

For comparative xenology, the inhuman however intersects with a strategic humanism based in the social conditions of rationality. Such an approach takes stock of human relevance when faced with the challenge of the inhuman. In order to better grasp by comparative analysis what the inhuman may mean today, this section will first present what 'inhuman' and 'inhumanism' have meant in the past – from the first notable use in the works of Robinson Jeffers, through the philosophical context of Jean-François Lyotard, to our working hypothesis developed by Reza Negarestani.

Jeffers: ascent into the abyss

Californian poet Robinson Jeffers is often considered the first herald of inhumanism – in his preface to the collection *The Double Axe and Other Poems*, Jeffers defines it as a "philosophical shifting of emphasis from man to not-man," one which "offers a reasonable detachment as a rule of conduct."[2] Jeffers' poetics explore a decentering of the world which tends away from the self-absorption of humanity towards exploring an inhuman reality which is superordinate to it and which everywhere exceeds it. Jeffers' poetic project notably employs the findings and language of his contemporary scientific worldview,[3] explicitly using new insights gleaned from the applied sciences of his time. He largely uses these to thematize and poeticize the deep geological materiality of our planet, for example writing in his poem "Margrave":

> The earth was the world and man was its measure, but our minds / have looked / Through the little mock-dome of heaven the telescope-slotted / observatory eyeball, there space and multitude came in / And the earth is a particle of dust by a sand-grain sun, lost in a / nameless cove of the shores of a continent. / Galaxy on galaxy, innumerable swirls of innumerable stars, endured / as it were forever and humanity / Came into being, its two

> or three million years are a moment, in / a moment it will certainly cease out from being / And galaxy on galaxy endure after that as it were forever . . .[4]

It is important to note that Jeffers is referencing the developments in the scientific understanding of his time, particularly the discovery of geological deep time,[5] and refernces the language of astronomy and geology. From these he constructs a new poetic imaginarium for humanity, one which re-situates "man" from the pedestal of humanism and contextualizes 'him' within the material space of the inhuman. Attempting to move beyond a narcissistic pre-occupation with the self-image of humanity, Jeffers' inhuman poetics is made accessible by means of technological apparatuses which outscale and see beyond what had until then been the human "measure." This expansion of the scale of the wider cosmos vicariously redefines humanity's own species existence as a mere moment within the material existence of the wider world.

The same shift in scale furthermore applies not only to the spatial dimension, but also to temporality. In "Carmel Point" Jeffers similarly writes:

> The extraordinary patience of things! / This beautiful place defaced with a crop of suburban houses— [...] Now the spoiler has come: does it care? Not faintly. / It has all time. It knows the people are a tide / That swells and in time will ebb, and all / Their works dissolve.[6]

The two above quotes show more than mere nihilism or a stoic ethic in the face of the imperial passage of time. Jeffers explicitly engages with the new insights gained from western science of his era and poeticizes the way its findings recast humanity within a new epistemology, one with different material operations and logics. The alienation precipitated by the discovery of the inhuman scale thus inevitably, by way of course, recasts the position of humanity.

In the poem "Animals," Jeffers furthermore speaks about animal life worlds, the "many chemistries of animal life / Beside the slow oxidation of carbohydrates and amino acids"[7] – again, Jeffers employs the language of the natural sciences, in this case chemistry and molecular biology, to poetic ends and frames inhumanism as a particular poetic position engaging the human with

its material world on new grounds. His poetics then do not exalt the world as 'man's' dominion, but rather contain humanity as a byproduct of a vaster world and cosmos, seeing the human as simply one form of biological existence amongst others. He casts humanist positioning as a reaction formation against an inhuman world.

It is important to note that Jeffers' *inhumanism* is not in any way *inhumane*, as in cruel or callous (in the sense of point 1 discussed in the introduction to this chapter). As Jeffers' translator into Czech Kamil Bednář writes,[8] Jeffers' "inhumanism" denoted "things which are not human, and which transcend the human, not at all an inhumanity in the sense of cruelty, but rather rocks and the ocean, for example."[9] Jeffers formulates an inhumanism which does not stand against the humanist valuation of anthropic life, but rather aims to transcend the humanist myopia and obsession with all things human by pointing out the immense material reality of the planetary and cosmic aesthetic he worked to construct.

Jeffers thus inevitably realizes and explores the reflexive dissolution and revision of the category of 'human' itself, closing "Carmel Point" with an eloquent call to transcend the singular anthropocentric perspective and its pervasive self-absorption by asserting: "As for us: / We must uncenter our minds from ourselves; / We must unhumanize our views a little, and become confident / As the rock and ocean that we were made from."[10]

The poetics of Robinson Jeffers have garnered new attention over the last decade,[11] and it is easy to see how his preoccupation with ecological thought and the wilderness, his geological scale of poetics coupled with his sensitivity to effervescent non-human life have found resonance in an era preoccupied with advancing climate change and pervasive environmental destruction. His particular framing of inhumanism has also found resonance in contemporary philosophy – philosophies such as speculative realism and object oriented ontology have similarly made recourse to an inhuman reality which is never reducible to mere correlation with the human intellect and sensory apparatus, but which everywhere traverses and transcends it. Perhaps paradoxically, such an aesthetic *ungrounds* the life world of the manifest image of humanity by casting it into the vast expanse of a material reality in which the preoccupation with the Human as the final limit of the possible falls flat.

Jeffers' inhumanist poetics in this regard comprise one of the first and most eloquent stirrings of a vast planetary aesthetics based in the idiom of inhumanism. His formulation has come to constitute a new vista from which to observe the relationship of humanity and its outside, destabilizing the human subject and framing a subjectivity which productively alienates it from its previously hardened self-image.

Lyotard's sublime inhumanism

A reading of inhumanism which is closer to the philosophical idiom can be found in the work of Jean-François Lyotard, notably in his series of essays compiled under the title The Inhuman, originally published in 1988 as *L'Inhuman: Causeries sur le Temps*. Here, Lyotard's inhumanism is in many ways similar to the inhumanism of Jeffers insofar as it is preoccupied 1) with the epistemology of science and its intersections with human culture and 2) with the material world which everywhere exceeds humanity's self-image and self-reference.

A central point of overlap between Lyotard's and Jeffers' approach to the inhuman is found in their shared exploration of the 'landscape' as an envelope for humanity's existence, one which remains radically superordinate to it. The landscape has been adopted as a cultural symbol which exceeds humanity's lived experience, and it is interesting that both writers invoke the ground of the landscape as a plane of intersection between the material world and the accreted self-image of the human. Where Jeffers expounded on the sublimity of the wild landscapes of Big Sur, Carmel Point and the American West Coast, Lyotard writes:

> It used to be said that landscapes – *pagus*, those borderlands where matter offers itself up in a raw state before being tamed – were wild because they were, in Northern Europe, always forests. FORIS, outside. [...] Whether or not you 'like' a landscape is unimportant. It does not ask for your opinion. If it is there, your opinion counts as nothing. A landscape leaves the mind DESOLATE.[12]

In Lyotard's take, the abstract 'outside' is here given concrete form as a landscape and "forest." Although a forest has indicated a standing reserve *for* the human

through its disposition to be extracted, it has always exceeded the confines of industrial and economic language. For Lyotard, this excess to the forest affects the human as desolation. We see here that the forest's challenge to human anthropocentrism needn't come from a direct confrontation against the human: by indexing the excess of humanity, and thus its fundamental non-primacy, this repressed contingency affects the human vicariously, by way of course. Both Jeffers (consider the lines: "does it care? Not faintly. / It has all time. It knows the people are a tide") and Lyotard thus situate the inhuman as a register which is in the last instance indifferent to the scope of the human and external to it in its temporal and spatial superordination.

It is this gnawing realization of the contingency of the human condition that Lyotard considers a vector of desolation. Desolation is here a form of anxiety brought about not by any particular effects or 'problems,' as we often hear in contemporary ecophilosophical discourse (i.e. the need to address the particular problems of advancing climate change, loss of biodiversity, environmental pollution, persistent toxicity...), but a transcendent form of desolation developing from the internal logic of a de-centering of the human. Desolation comes with the arrestation of the humanity's self-ordained exaltation.

And in both Lyotard and Jeffers, this outside to the domesticity of the human is constructed as a site of sublimity and transcendence not only in terms of its spatial dimensions, but also in temporal terms. Through the irruption of deep time, space and time find themselves in co-constitutive and mutual resonance: The discovery of stratigraphy in the 19th century helped assume an irreversible "arrow of time" in the perennial accretion of matter, and such a science of material sedimentation opened temporal vistas which greatly exceed any historical human temporal scope. The realization that time leaves material traces at vast scales becomes one of the seminal vectors for the discovery and analysis of the inhuman, accelerating the collapse of a mythical, Biblical time in the modern era and beyond. Both Jeffers and Lyotard in this regard speak about a material, geological scope of time within which the history of the human is always-already nested. The rocks, oceans and forests come to index a temporal frame which everywhere transcends the human's historical self-image and overwrites it by its spatio-temporal magnitude which comes from beyond the human's self-anointed history. Lyotard: "Matter asks

no questions, expects no answers of us. It ignores us. It made us the way it made all bodies – by chance and according to its laws."[13]

A note on the aesthetics of the sublime is in order here: Immanuel Kant's modern definition of sublimity is that of an affect deriving from the perception of a grand danger at one remove.[14] In *The Inhuman*, Lyotard directly engages with Kant's notion of the sublime at numerous points, notably in the essay "After the Sublime, the State of Aesthetics," where he writes that the "paradox" of representation (Lyotard uses the term "art") after the sublime, is that

> it turns towards a thing which does not turn towards the mind, that it wants a thing, or has it in for a thing which wants nothing of it. After the sublime, we find ourselves after the will.[15]

This asymmetrical relationship of the human to the inhuman plane becomes sublime in its evacuation of the humanist will. Sublimity, in other words, can never be contained in the fearful particulars which exist *for* the human, but rather always indexes a wider mindscape of "desolation" wherein lies the true horror: because such a landscape is not particular in its source and a problem to be resolved, it comes with the realization that the very singularity of the human self-image and its epistemological prerequisites are of themselves relative. Lyotard:

> The Thing is not waiting to be destined, it is not waiting for anything, it does not call on the mind. How can the mind situate itself, get in touch with something that withdraws from every relationship?[16]

This withdrawal is however not commensurate with the withdrawal of 'objects' in Graham Harman's object oriented ontology (in which the objects' "volcanic core" is always elusive) – it is rather the withdrawal of the very ground itself. To adopt Keller Easterling's call to look beyond object to matrix, such an inhuman phenomenology is predicated on the withdrawal of an entire matrix of meaning and signification. The experience of alienation qua withdrawal expands for an entire world whose functioning remains opaque, black-boxed, and orthogonal to the human's best laid plans. The question of human knowledge and science thus comes to the fore as a methodology for grappling with such an inhuman landscape.

> The mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms are ordered by knowledge, and knowledge takes to them quite spontaneously. But a landscape is an excess of presence. My savoir-vivre is not enough. A glimpse of the inhuman [is] A vanishing of a standpoint [...][17]

Lyotard here frames the outside landscape as an excess to human epistemology and as the vector through which the human-centered standpoint recedes. For Lyotard, such a 'humanity' is, however, still largely commensurate with the weighted legacy of western cultural production. His inhuman does not make particular progress towards a posthuman sensibility which may better account for humanity's fading image *as a form of praxis*. Lyotard still understands the outside as a transcendent signifier providing a philosophical alibi while leaving the ethical and social dimensions of inhumanity unanswered, and the next section on Reza Negarestani's inhuman rationality is better positioned to provide such a theory.

Lyotard's construct of the inhuman in this sense adopts a latently necropolitical logic. He famously posits the necropolitical drive by invoking the sublime and transcendent "explosion to come" which renders any thought of systemic suffering ultimately foreclosed, stillborn, politically defused. In his essay "Can Thought Go on Without a Body," he writes that with the death of the Sun, which will arrive in 4.5 billion years, all thought, and indeed the very thought of thought, is always already sentenced to perish. Seen from his specular, transcendent position, humanity is a mere blip within cosmic timescales so vast as to become, by a philosophical sleight of hand, wholly sublime: "The inevitable explosion to come, the one that's always forgotten in your intellectual ploys, can be seen in a certain way as coming before the fact to render these ploys posthumous."[18] This "certain way" of seeing is that of the outside irrupting from out of time – as a transcendent signifier which allegedly informs thought by means of its own future death: "With the disappearance of earth, thought will have stopped – leaving the disappearance absolutely unthought of."[19] We can see the inklings of an accelerationist inhumanism in this assertion, insofar as Lyotard evacuates the social response-ability and persistent sociality which structures planetary life worlds. The challenge then seems to address the posthumous condition of humanity as a call towards a posthuman praxis (i.e. a praxis which remains after the collapse of will).

Lyotard's approach does not resolve any pragmatic and ethical horizons to inhuman action (or inaction and complacency, for that matter). Merely abstracting thought for billions of years as a virtual, speculative exercise does not resolve the pressing existence and enmeshment in the now, in the dynamics of the decade, century, or millennium for that matter... Such short timespans which percolate with the rhythm of life play an immense role in the practice of transgenerational human sociality and impress themselves as a deep drive for the survival of the planetary life worlds.

The dawn of the Anthropocene in the past centuries shows the manifest and profound asynchronicity of the human project with the geological deep time of the wider planetary condition, and Lyotard in this way leverages inhumanism as a concept which evacuates the social register, leaving only a slow death at the hands of the cosmos. But the postulation of a transcendent outside does not overwrite the social practice of life as such, nor its insistent practice of survival and making sense by means of communication and the practice of sociality. Shifting Lyotard's fundamental question *can thought go on without a body*?, the inhuman mode of comparative xenology asks *can thought go on after the will*? What of the posthumous and posthuman body after the collapse of the modernist will?

Negarestani's labor of the inhuman

In his essay "The Labor of the Inhuman," published on e-flux magazine in 2014, philosopher Reza Negarestani constructs the inhuman as a particular vector of reason and a means for a continuous and strategic (re)construction of humanity. Such a focus considers reason as the vehicle through which the concept of 'human' may exit the mythology of Humanism and initiate the laborious process of reconstructing itself in the image of its own inhumanity. Departing from the previous conflations of the inhuman with a sublime Outside on the one hand, or the mere materialist scale of the non-human on the other, Negarestani's inhumanism rather turns reflexive, assuming the inhuman as a natural aptitude and practice of synthetic reasoning (here, again, as both a 'being with' as much as an 'artificial construction').

Inhuman rationality then aims to construct the space of reason as an artificial and contingent endeavor without

evacuating its universal capacity for the practice of sociality. Negarestani notably inscribes the semiotics of such an inhuman 'reason' under the concept of "commitment." The humanist "*commitment to humanity*" becomes a present project engaged in the social life worlds found to be, first and foremost, thoroughly inhuman in their method and scale.

Negarestani furthermore assumes reason to be integrally invested in the revision of its own original presuppositions. He writes: "humanism [...] is the initial condition of inhumanism as a force that travels back from the future to alter, if not completely discontinue, the command of its origin."[20] Such abductive revisionism and progressive bootstrapping of the human project promises its development beyond the tenets of modernist humanism. It opens towards the inhuman while retaining the 'human' as a shifting, receding and negotiated reference point. Negarestani: "Inhumanism is exactly the activation of the revisionary program of reason against the self-portrait of humanity."[21] The emancipatory trajectory of inhuman reason thus rather becomes a vehicle which is poised to synthetically outgrow the enshrined humanist self-image in favor of others. In this striving to overcome the original humanist frame of western metaphysics, such an inhuman reason provides example of a strategic humanism par excellence, one in which the human is a receding point in the project of the inhuman while never becoming wholly lost.

There is again a temporal circuitry at play here: inhuman reason comes to overwrite the particulars of the Humanist project while retaining the commitment, or 'response-ability,' to the conception of the human as a stabilizing concept for pragmatic, ethical conduct. It in this way remains open to revision on the basis of new inputs and new calibrations (and is, in Donna Haraway's sense "response-able") while accepting its fundamental commitment to the abstract 'human'– such a category is always in the process of dissolution, always approaching its final evacuation, but always again finding new plateaus of what its own 'humanity' may entail. This is what comprises its inhuman phenomenology – to understand oneself as always departing but never gone.

The social dimension of such a project – with its cultural, economic, civic and political intricacies – is thus reinjected into the discourse of the inhuman by taking humanism beyond its conservative limits and letting the inhuman rationality irrupt from below, from the sphere

of the planetary. Such a project is not in any way anti-human but rather anti-humanist – it constitutes an apoptosis of humanism in favor of a responsive and responsible inhumanity, positing "revision" as "a license for [the] further construction" of humanity. Such an inhumanism works through and along with other manifest expressions of humanity (which have oftentimes been rationally accessible, but for various reasons disregarded) without neither callously appropriating them nor evacuating them altogether. It is in this way that Negarestani's inhumanism "disrupts a future anticipation built on the descriptions and prescriptions provided by a conservative humanism,"[22] which has been shown to be ever more exclusive and unable to account for manifest humanity at planetary scale.

It is notable that Negarestani's framing of inhumanism has been used[23] in the context of xenofeminism as an aspect in constructing a new planetary politics. Writers like Helen Hester or Diann Bauer also adopt the frame of the inhuman as a tool for the construction of a novel politics of alienation, or what they call a "xenopolitics." Such an inhumanism is invaluable insofar as it deconstructs the tradition of particularity inherent in Eurocentric and Western reason (and potentially others), while at the same time invoking the developing vector of abstracted reason as a driver for the epistemological reconstructions occurring in the present. Insofar as it inherently questions the speculative limits of the possible as they currently exist, it comprises a question of the reinvention of futurity.

Significantly for the thesis of comparative xenology, such inhuman reason comes to be defined by a particular form of sociality. Read through the prism of planetarity (discussed in the following chapter), Negarestani's inhumanism provides a vector for regarding the very machinations of reason as alien, artificial, politically synthetic and never complete, while at the same time being constructed from the side of a negotiable ethics. The shriveling of traditional humanism opens a space for the construction of novel self-images of humanity, ones which would no longer necessarily be weighed to the side of any particular ethnicity, creed or nationality while retaining them as the difficult situations which structure the now.

Although Negarestani explicitly assumes reason to be self-constructed – calling for an "automation of reason" which would work to complexify social politics in the face of a manifestly developing technocratic layer of governance – the basic realization of inhumanism as commensurate

with the originary artificiality of the human construct (i.e. the "Picture of 'Us' drawn in Sand"[24]) provides license to leverage anthropocentrism in socially strategic and ethical ways. Inhumanism is in this way not exclusive to computation and the construction of new technical tools and intelligences, because its social logic rather opens a space for a cultural constructivism which may lie beyond the exclusive dictates of the technical milieu, the economy, or the market.

What manages to move beyond the frame of ideology is the social phenomenology of alienation inherent in its very logic. Rather than any particular ideological system, Negarestani finds the discursive binding point for such an inhuman rationality in the constructed yet palpable choice of commitment, tangentially invoking the "xeno-patterning" of Luciana Parisi and its capacity for the curation and reinvention of the new. His emphasis on the possibility of revising the particulars of commitment without losing contact with its underlying ethical imperatives allows for the reappraisal of the particular 'human' self-image without losing sight of the pressing responseability toward its (and others') continued existence.

It is in this way that Negarestani's inhumanism makes of the very concept of humanity an experimental project open to (re)construction and alterity. His labor of the inhuman opens a fissure in the imperial text of mono-humanism through its shifting signification and delimitation of humanity and its revision of social relations. It is here that his project intersects with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of planetarity: although the notion of 'the human' may be ever receding, it remains as an ethical point of orientation – alienated, synthetic but perennially insistent on its relevance.

1. Quentin Meillassoux, After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency (Continuum, 2008), 17 [e-pub].
2. Frederic I. Carpenter, "The Inhumanism of Robinson Jeffers," Western American Literature, vol. 16, no. 1 (Spring 1981), 19-25; Robinson Jeffers, The Double Axe and Other Poems (New York: Liverlight, 1977), xxi.
3. Carpenter, "The Inhumanism of Robinson Jeffers," 23.
4. Robinson Jeffers, "Margrave," PoemHunter (12 April 2010), accessed 12 June 2023, https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/margrave/.
5. For a contemporary account of deep time, see for example Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Anthropocene Time," History and Theory, vol. 57, no. 1 (March 2018), 5-32.
6. Robinson Jeffers, "Carmel Point," The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers, ed. Tim Hunt (Stanford University Press, 1995), poets.org, accessed 12 June 2023, https://poets.org/poem/carmel-point.
7. Robinson Jeffers, "Animals", Poetry (January, 1951), 190, Poetry Foundation, accessed 12 June 2023, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=25639.
8. Indeed, the reception of Jeffers' poetry in Cold War Czechoslovakia was stellar, and the print runs of tens of thousands of copies were often sold out in hours. For a more in-depth analysis of the impact Jeffers' work had in the socialist republic, please see: Petr Kopecký. "The Warm Reception of Robinson Jeffers' Poetry in Cold War Czechoslovakia," in THE WILD THAT ATTRACTS US: New Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers, ed. ShaunAnne Tangney (University of New Mexico Press, 2015), 223-252.
9. Kamil Bednář, "Samotář, myslící na osud lidstva," Robinson Jeffers: Básně z jestřábí věže, Kamil Bednář, ed. (Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1964), 8.
10. Jeffers, "Carmel Point."
11. ShaunAnne Tangney, ed., THE WILD THAT ATTRACTS US: New Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers; "The Manifesto," The Dark Mountain Project (2023), accessed 12 June 2023, https://dark-mountain.net/about/manifesto/.
12. Jean-François Lyotard, The Inhuman: Reflections on Time (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 186.
13. Lyotard, 11.
14. Immanuel Kant, Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 11-64.
15. Lyotard, 142.
16. Lyotard, 142.
17. Lyotard, 187.
18. Lyotard, 9.
19. Lyotard, 9.
20. Reza Negarestani, "Labor of the Inhuman Part II: The Inhuman," e-flux no. 53 (March 2014), accessed 10 June 2023, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/53/59893/the-labor-of-the-inhuman-part-ii-the-inhuman/.

21. Negarestani, “Labor of the Inhuman Part II: The Inhuman.”
22. Reza Negarestani, “Labor of the Inhuman Part II: The Inhuman.”
23. Or rather ab-used – in Gayatri Spivak’s understanding of “ab-use” as “use from below.” See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Introduction,” An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization (Harvard University Press, 2012), 3. Spivak writes that she used the expression in her 1992 lecture in Cape Town to “suggest that we learn to use the European Enlightenment from below […] because the Latin prefix ‘ab’ says much more than ‘below.’ Indicating both ‘motion away’ and ‘agency, point of origin’ […]”
24. Negarestani referencing Michel Foucault, “Labor of the Inhuman Part II: The Inhuman.”Y

towards xenoplanetarity: multiculturalism, globalism, planetarity

Xenoplanetarity consists in the labor of inhuman rationality in its engagement with social construction at planetary scale. Its theoretical practice then consists in excavating the myriad manifestations and choreographies of planetary hospitality as they currently exist, while at the same time assuming an engaged, response-able (re)construction of the concept of the human which such an endeavor entails. The former aims to put in focus the specular, imaginary totality of the planet in relation to the actual social discourses which structure its various practices, while the latter shifts the focus from a prescriptive ideology of universality to the practical negotiation of its lived conditions now and into the future.

In her 1997 lecture "Imperative to Re-Imagine the Planet," Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak defined planetarity as an irreducible register of politics operating at planetary scale in the post-colonial situation. Spivak gave her original lecture at the Stiftung Dialogik in Zurich, framing her position of planetarity within the particular context of 1990s Swiss immigration. She developed her politics of the stranger as a theory of planetary sociality in which the diverse, more-than-humanist, planetary existences assume a necessary ethics of alterity.

Spivak bases this constant reflection and generation of cultural and social difference on a universal acknowledgment that "the 'planet' [is] a catachresis for inscribing collective responsibility as right," and that it is also the "imagined proper receiver and transmitter of imperatives."[1] Spivak here is however careful not to speak for any realist notion that the geological planet itself is a source of commitment and destiny, but rather that the "imagined" virtuality of the planet also assumes a particular form of speculation and political negotiation. Her planetary ethics is in this sense similar to Negarestani's inhuman rationality predicated on a "commitment" to humanity and the acknowledgment of the human as a planetary force, without however universalizing or naturalizing any of its synchronic or particular expressions.

She notably sees this logic of difference as irreducible – meaning as a perennial negotiation, never to be completed, neither in the present nor future. It is in this sense that Spivak espouses a synthetic and artificial practice based in the hard labor of politics, one which explicitly

resituates, repurposes and reconstructs the distribution and significance of the shared category of "humanity" as much as that of "the planet."

Such a political frame can be said to exist *avant la lettre* without making itself a hegemony, and planetarity in this sense ungrounds the futurological proclivity to monohumanist enclosure or any final solution to the 'problem' of sociality as seen from the perspective of various imperial monohumanisms. Spivak argues that although "alterity" is its integral principle, planetarity as such remains "mysterious and discontinuous – an experience of the impossible."[2] The political experience of planetarity is ever mutable and in in constant flux – from the speeds and tempos of the voracious acceleration of human extractivist and connective projects as much as the slow, glacial pace of geological and planetary dynamics which have inscribed themselves on the palimpsest of the human and its politics. The planet seen through the prism of planetarity can never *be* a particular vessel for the universal, but is rather a site for synthetic politics – a medium in the proper sense (i.e. an environment) which assumes the process of synthetic *becoming* as a basic structuring principle.

We will follow Spivak's line of inquiry, but in order to better construct what the notion of xenoplanetarity may entail, both in theory and practice, we must first define her vision of planetarity negatively, i.e. against that which it is not: that is multiculturalism and globalism.

For Spivak speaking in 1997, multiculturalism provided a concept against which she also defined her theory of planetarity. The politics of multiculturalism aimed to provide an alternative to ethnic nationalism through a logic of socio-cultural placation bound by a federative mandate and its attendant universalism. Multiculturalist politics were aiming to integrate the alterity in the form of an identitarian patchwork within the legal, territorial, and social fold of a given state. Spivak did not see it as panacea of intercultural relations, a sort of socio-political "end of history," but rather (quite rightly) considered it a particular solution to a particular problem of governance.

For Spivak, 'multiculturalism' is a paleonym – "a name with a history." She speaks particularly about the Swiss context and "Europe," but in the context of political practice (for example, in its historical adoption by the government of P.-E. Trudeau in Canada throughout

the 1970s and 80s) she considered it as an effect of particular conditions and particular governmental needs. Spivak remains critical of the multiculturalist project as a general systemics for dealing with alterity, because it does not properly engage with the diverse displaced diasporas on mutual grounds. In order to be able to move outside of the imaginarium of the West as "the giver – of hospitality, or neighborly love," it is necessary to give these concepts "a proper name within a planetary graphic, not within a continental metonymy."[3]

Spivak also criticized multiculturalism for often promulgating unproductive, culturally contingent practices over reasonable ones. While she acquiesces that "multiculturalism performs a critique, however inchoate, of the limits of the rational structures of civil society,"[4] in its provision to retain the plurality of voices within the political envelope of a given territory, Spivak sees that multiculturalism runs the risk of protecting and promulgating "unreasonable cultural practices as a sign of freedom."[5] Against this 'separate but equal' model she proposes multifaceted political engagement, noting the necessity of interchange and mutual integration among the various actors of the polis, as well as the shared negotiation and construction of the limits of what a civil society might be. She frames planetarity as a political idiom which consists in "intending without guarantees," and which must be "urged on both sides"[6] of the divide – rather than adopting the mandate of federalist separation, Spivak urges a symmetrical and pluralist engagement which would aim to construct a new and synthetic social space among the internal actors and communities of a given state.

But, as shown by intersectional feminism, there are never only two sides (i.e. the marked and the universal, the 'other' and the 'self'), but a multitude of degrees and forms of markedness which carry with them particular affordances of cultural communication and which may, under particular conditions, also become potential channels of oppression. In this sense, the intersectional approach to subjectivity regards any socius as always-already a split subject, one which is co-constituted through democratic (oftentimes agonist) discourse which may potentially prove responsive, responsible, and detailed enough to produce solutions to relevant problems. Multiculturalism for Spivak then constitutes a particular form of political leveling, providing merely an answer to the question of cultural practice as based in the intentions of a molar

nationalism. Planetarity, on the other hand, constructs sociality from a politics which always problematically lays beyond the mandate of state and empire, and remains response-able to the lived conditions of the present.

This productive civic engagement has two effects: on the one hand, it reclaims the alienation of the 'foreign' or strange subject insofar as it frees it from the traditional position of 'the white man's burden' of which Spivak is so critical;[7] but it simultaneously brings Spivak to the crux of her argument for the mutuality and symmetricality of the immigrant and the landed inhabitants: "I suggest that we have something to learn from the underclass of immigrants, in the interest of a more just modernity"[8] – in this way, she argues for the productive potential which alterity can bring to the West. Concretely speaking, she finds this lesson brought by the immigrant as consisting in the "remnants of a responsible pragma"[9] which can be gleaned from their imported non-universalist, and assumedly pre-capitalist epistemologies – what the immigrant can bring is also the echo of the potentially pragmatic forms of sociality and praxis which may have been present before the impositions of Western coloniality and capitalism.

Here I would disagree with Spivak on her assumption that the immigrant is the carrier of their own brand of pre-modern knowledge and pragmatic sociality, as such cultural relativism shows us that these topical knowledges may be xenophobic and bigoted (i.e. the "unreasonable cultural practices as a sign of freedom"). It is rather that the very process of immigration overwrites an immigrant's specular ambassadorship of any chthonic or originary cultural position. We can rather say that the immigrant always brings with her the cultural experience of immigration itself as an experience of relative alienation. This xenopolitics of the stranger may be more beneficial than attempting to mine an oftentimes imaginary cultural memetics, and provides a basis for practices which may enrich the habituated proceduralities of the given locale and can engage with the contemporary frame of alienation as, for example, in the context of Krzysztof Wodiczko's "cities that are already fully built".[10]

Such pragmatics of the stranger are, however, not to be necessarily incorporated into the mosaic of the community or city as mere continuation of neo-liberal economics and marketing strategy, but ought to extend to the level of civic society in which the intricacies of co-habitation and mutuality are negotiated beyond

the mandate of the market. An immigrant thus cannot be intersectionally interpellated as solely an economic actor but also a social, cultural, and political one.

Spivak calls this fundamental aspect of social interaction with the foreign 'responsibility': The "developed post-capitalist structure must once again be filled with the more robust imperative to responsibility which capitalist social productivity was obliged to destroy."[11] Spivak furthermore considers such mutual responsibility to be a fundamental right insofar as it is a species characteristic, the social mode of humanity as such: "civility requires your practice of responsibility as a pre-originary right."[12] It is in this sense that Spivak's vision of planetarity dissolves the firm contours of state-supported 'multicultural policy' or 'politics of immigration' in favor of cultivating a more symmetrical and non-privileged idiom of interaction among the (un)homely. Such a form of interaction based in the various alienations of the intersectional condition then ought to be based in a mutual exchange (or "response-ability" in the sense of Dona Haraway). It assumes a rational commitment to the idea of a synthetic humanity while accepting alienation as inherent in any contemporary social construction. It is here that alienation is taken as a productive condition.

Where multiculturalism positions itself as a socio-political solution to planetary kinetics, globalism aims to be a techno-economic one. Globalization details the planet as 'the globe' – that is a metaphorical model which smooths the surface of the planet along the creases and flows of international exchange, logistics, and finance. Spivak considers globalization as "the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere,"[13] and globalization can in this sense be said to impose a monetary and logistical matrix which levels difference and subsumes an increasing number of relations and items to the maxim of market value. Globalization constitutes the smoothing and expansion of systems and infrastructures of exchange across the planet in which "the globe" is cast as the idealized metaphor of smooth space networked through the flow of capital.[14]

Speaking historically, the globe for Spivak is a concept which starts developing through the "discovery" of the surface of the planet during the modern Era of Discovery, and remains implicated in the politics of colonization and imperial projection. The legacy of Afro-American slavery and the Atlantic Triangular trade, or the politics

of various joint-stock companies extracting and shipping goods from the Indies to Europe (i.e. The East India Company, the Dutch East India Company, etc.) provide a particular history and matrix of nautical shipping, colonial resource extraction and asymmetrical exchange. Spivak then assumes the idea of globalism as building on this historical model and sees globalism as a continuation of its historical practices which make up an integral part of western economic ideology up until today.

But apart from the logistical and economic aspects of globalism, it is interesting for the contemporary reader to see Spivak consider cybernetic apparatuses and computational infrastructures as always-already implicated in a similar logic of equalization and domination within the wider project of globalization. For Spivak, the advancing computerization and the age of communication developing in the 1990s constituted a technological project collusive with economic and semiotic imperialism, or the mandate of what she calls "electronic capital."

> It is not too fanciful to say, in the gridwork of electronic capital, we achieve something that resembles the abstract ball covered in latitudes and longitudes, cut by virtual lines, once the equator and the tropics, now drawn increasingly by other requirements –imperatives?– of Geographical Information Systems.[15]

Beyond her purely political and discursive analysis focused on the ethical and pragmatic "imperatives," we find an inchoate theory which engages computation with the geological substrate of the planet. Apart from the rational question on the requirements and imperatives of computational architectures, or what Spivak calls "Geographical Information Systems," her critique provides an early prefiguration of what Benjamin Bratton has more recently framed as "planetary-scaled computation"[16] – meaning a theory for addressing the vast assemblage of material objects, resources, communication lines, procedures and processes, human input, and their (always fraught) standardization protocols. Bratton theorizes this multilayered concept of the currently developing technological milieu through the model of 'the Stack.'

The allegory of The Stack also engages with the planetary scale through its formulation of the empirical dynamics of the developing technosphere – but where

Bratton speculates on the current dispositions and affordances which this new infrastructure provides, Spivak's critique from the 1990s remains critical to the computational and communicational infrastructure developing at her time. From the perspective of post-structuralist and postcolonial discursive analysis, she sees it as a manifestation of informational equivalency and a driver of global universalism. Spivak famously wrote: "The globe is on our computers. No one lives there,"[17] – in this statement we see her perhaps too easily linking the complex dynamics of computerization with the smooth operations of globalist capital which bypass the lived experience of the planet. Economic and computational globalization do not necessarily work hand in hand, and their logics and modes of reproduction have not always been aligned. Although the developing technosphere indeed has, in a certain sense, levelled differences across the planet, it has never fully subsumed them under any monotechnological mandate and has rather come to generate its own spectrum of factions and splinterings, as well as its own propensity for generating difference through new tools and protocols.

Although we can indeed agree with Spivak that "the globe is on our computers," it is not all that is there. The assertion that "no-one lives there" has, in the post-internet era, become difficult to maintain due to the ever-increasing permeability between 'real life' and the virtual 'world' on our screens, which has become ever more detailed, granular, and reflective of the actual. The saturation of internet coverage and accessibility have shown the exceeding inter-operability of the real and the virtual and have made any threshold between them more permeable than ever before. Approaching the technosphere from the perspective of planetary-scale computation shows it to be palimpsestic and technologically balkanized across various hardware platforms, state policies, languages, platformed gatekeepers, and various distributions of access. These are shown to be, first and foremost, determined by human political, economic and social actors who design, develop, consume and maintain them while at the same time being incontrovertibly engaged with the geological, mineral, chemical, and even atmospheric materiality of the planet. What to Spivak seemed like a leveling of power relations carried by American Silicon Valley capital has, since her writing, developed into a vast assemblage of computational infrastructures and

superstructures which remain engaged with the human practices of the world, and whose difference can also be identified along the fault lines of contemporary social politics and geopolitics.

Spivak then presents her notion of "planetarity" as an alternative to multiculturalism and globalism. In her original 1997 lecture, she defines it as a manifest and irreducible sociality reflective of the indigenous existences of the planet, defining it as the "mysterious and discontinuous" reality of the planet. She presents it as a form of political perspectivism which remains open to reflecting the vantage points of the planet's myriad eyes – a socio-political "experience of the impossible."

The realization and becoming conscious of the material existence of our planet does not transparently assume a smoothing of difference. In her 2015 reflection on her original 1997 lecture entitled "'Planetarity' (Box 4, WELT)," Spivak expands on the necessity and integrality of political difference and fragmentation:

> If we think dogmatically [...] of 'planetarity' as contained under another, prior concept of the object (the 'planet'), which constitutes a principle of reason, and then determine it in conformity with this, we come up with contemporary planet-talk by way of environmentalism, referring, usually, but not invariably, to an undivided 'natural' space rather than a differentiated political space. This smoothly 'translates' into the interest of globalization in the mode of the abstract as such. [...] My use of 'planetarity,' on the other hand, does not refer to any applicable methodology. It is different from a sense of being the custodians of our very own planet [...][18]

Here Spivak argues against a form of reason as a possible structuring principle of the social register of planetarity. What Spivak terms "contemporary planet-talk" allegedly construes the planet as a physical site with its own particular, non-human feedback mechanisms whose generation and promulgation she considers to be subsumed under the imperial-academic complex. In her original call for planetarity, Spivak instead aimed to "overwrite" this globalist logic eliminative of the social register, stating that "The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, indeed

are it."[19] And although the discourse of planetarity remains well aware of the findings of contemporary natural sciences (for example in drawing attention to ongoing environmental degradation, cliate change and loss of biodiversity), it works rather on the level of social signification and its capacity for generating multitudes and difference.

Is there then a way to redeem reason from the mono-humanism of the imperial projects of the past without discarding it in toto? And can an inhuman, synthetic reason perhaps come to provide a vector for navigating the postcolonial situation while providing the means for decolonial and post-human practices?

Jennifer Gabrys writes that "The planetary can be a different figure for undoing the totality of globes and globality. Rather than bringing the Earth into view as a total object [...] the planetary remains that which cannot be fixed or settled."[20] Once regarded through the eyes of inhuman rationality, Spivak's early vision of the planetary as commensurate with alterity fosters a model of cultural perspectivism which understands alternative views and visions as necessarily relevant and structurally engaging. By invoking her method of "practical dialogics," or the symmetrical exchange between actors, Spivak's planetarity originally aimed to "[keep] in play multiple modes of human inhabitation without having to resolve or synthesize these, or to render them within a relation of domination or subjugation."[21] It only follows that the inhuman navigation of the significance and significations of 'humanity' as an open-ended project provides an integral modus operandi for Spivak's theory of planetarity.

In order to avoid the lapsing of the planetary register into becoming merely "a spatial scale of capitalism in cahoots with the neoliberal state,"[22] Jeremy Bendik-Keymer argues for the need of "relational reason."[23] This would be a practice of reason which would develop the necessity of the intersocial and provide a way to remain honest to the pragmatics of inhuman relationships within the wider planetary situation. Such a situation consists in advancing climate change and the often eminently destructive transformation of its ecology. In line with the inhuman ethics of Reza Negarestani, one can assume this constant reconstruction of the human as a 'game of humanity' which everywhere engages with the more-than-human world. Language and politics matter in this endeavor, and although the rules are constantly shifting at various tempos, the planetary situation is also

made legible through the negotiations of an inhuman rationality. Such an endeavor inches towards the space of xenoplanetarity, which consists in the practice of a viable inhuman ethic for a turbulent world of anthropogenic transformation.

Bendik-Keymer importantly notes that "the planetary is not something one can grasp for others,"[24] fundamentally drawing on the situatedness of any enunciation. Planetarity is firm in retaining a sense for the integral alterity of social constructions, with their own particular conditions and affordances. As a central aspect for this thesis on the xeno, such conditions are found in their shared, ubiquitous fall into alienation. As shown by intersectional analysis, the limits of such inhuman enunciation in the present conditions of a technically saturated Earth are not set in stone – they become variously granular, bleed into one another, generate and erase one another; their contours are not molar and blockish but rather shimmer and grow from and through each other. It is here that xenoplanetarity posits that others' positions are always closer than they appear, already engaging with an 'us' even before a subject becomes conscious of such an exchange.

Following its investment into the xeno, xenoplanetarity wagers that the imperatives of the planet are ethical and social in their nature, and fundamentally tied to the experience and the paradoxical intimacy of alienation. Where 'the globe' levels culture and society in order to reduce it and make it legible to economic extraction, an 'alien planet' rather actively accounts for the persistent remainder of cohabitation, an synthetic ethic of being-with between the fraught concept of 'humanity' and its ever-expanding horizon of the more-than-human. This is the space of inhumanism.

Such a frame is however careful to never assume a final solution to the question of the foreigner and works against any form of ritual scapegoating which may make the contours of alienation harder and, paradoxically, easier to process and manipulate at vast scales. On an alien planet, there is always a remainder to signification. And here lies the difference between Spivak's planetarity and the framing of a xenoplanetary politics: where the former considers the "principle of reason" to be integrally collusive with powers of coloniality and extraction, the former assumes it as a vector for a potentially productive inhuman reasoning – one which is progressively artificial

and alienating but which remains predicated on the commitment to the potentially fading (but never lost) concept of 'humanity.'

Xenoplanetarity looks from the vantage point of the post-humanities in order to better integrate the particular kinetics of humanity within a new, alien, and planetary register. It in this sense reflects the factual, empirical diversity while retaining the fundamental position of reason by engaging in what Robert Brandom has called 'the game of giving and asking for reasons.'

This is perhaps the promise of a (xeno)planetarity which would be an integrally "transversal" project and which would engage the experience of our only recently discovered "planet" while always keeping in mind the non-reducibility of the lived worlds which transpire upon it. It is in this way that planetarity can become integrated in the hard work of politics as a discourse on the problematic imperatives enmeshed with the complexities of the social world.

Spivak's original conception of planetarity in this sense opens the door to an inhuman and strategic anthropocentrism which may prove to be a viable mode of moving forward into an ever more precarious and alienated future.

1. Spivak, An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization, 343
2. Spivak, An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization, 341.
3. Spivak, An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization, 349.
4. Spivak, An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization, 340.
5. Spivak, An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization, 340.
6. Spivak, An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization, 340.
7. I.e. the fetishistic mindset first explicitly expressed in Rudyard Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden" (1899) which simultaneously invokes messianism, western exceptionalism, supported by pathological strain of willful ignorance to present and agential social conditions.
8. Spivak, An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization, 347.
9. Spivak, An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization, 347.
10. Krzysztof Wodiczko, Critical Vehicles: Writings, Projects, Interviews (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999), 6.
11. Spivak, An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization, 346.
12. Spivak, An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization, 347.
13. Spivak, An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization, 338.
14. For a typology of planetary metaphors, and that of 'the globe' foremost, see Lukáš Likavčan, Introduction to Comparative Planetology, (Strelka, 2019).
15. Spivak, An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization, 338.
16. Benjamin Bratton, The Stack (MIT, 2015).
17. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "'Planetarity' (Box 4, WELT)," Paragraph, vol. 38, no. 2 (2015), 291.
18. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Planetarity' (Box 4, WELT)," Paragraph, vol. 38, no. 2 (July 2015): 290-292.
19. Spivak, An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization, 338.
20. Jennifer Gabrys, "Becoming Planetary," e-flux (October 2018), accessed 14 June 2023, https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/accumulation/217051/becoming-planetary/. Here, Gabrys seems to collapse the difference between the 'planetary' – as a scale of the physical planet – with Spivak's original 'planetarity' – as the realization of manifest social alterity.
21. Gabrys, "Becoming Planetary."
22. Jeremy Bendik-Keymer, "'Planetarity,' 'Planetarism,' and the Interpersonal," e-flux Notes (May 27, 2020), accessed 14 June 2023, https://www.e-flux.com/notes/434304/planetarity-planetarism-and-the-interpersonal.
23. Bendik-Keymer.
24. Bendik-Keymer.

preliminaries of xenoplanetarity

This chapter concludes with some possible forays towards xenoplanetarity as a form of political epistemology and practice. First and foremost, it must be said that contemporary posthuman theory shows that alterity and difference are not exclusively mediated by the human – humanity is everywhere enmeshed in processes which exceed it, both spatially and temporally. If Gregory Bateson defined information as "the difference that makes a difference,"[1] human communication and its material practices are shown to be part of the networks of relations which facilitate an expanded concept of diverse, more-than-human planetary existences, each of which have a say in the planetary situation.

But some are more impactful than others. Recent discussions on the advent and persistence of the Anthropocene[2] show that the affective power of humanity remains in certain aspects disproportionate to the rest of the biosphere, notably its potential for accelerating the tempos of transformation. These (quite often pathological) effects have lead to general ecocide driven by the warming of the atmosphere due to fossil fuel use and ineffective land management, the production and distribution of microplastics and pollutants, and many other phenomena.

But as noted by the work of Diann Bauer or Helen Hester's notion of xenohospitality, humanity is also the most able species on the planet to mitigate its own excesses. The question then seems to be whether its practice of caretaking and hospitality can scale up to the task.

If pervasive anthropogenic extinction of the biosphere is a current fact, it is the position of xenoplanetarity that such an event ought not be accelerated. That is also why a "strategic anthropocentrism" (Braidotti) is necessary to frame any widely political project, if only to curb the most excessive pathologies of ongoing human activity. Following Reza Negarestani's assertion that we must cultivate the inhuman "by dissociating human significance from human glory,"[3] the concept of xenoplanetarity aims to construct alterity as the vector for the apoptosis of humanism while retaining humanity as a significant and strategic concept acting within the context of our planet.

Such a paradigm can notably be developed through exploring the connotations and operations of the xeno.

The process of alienation makes one lose what is non-productive and dispensable while acquiring proficiency in emergent modes of production and reproduction. Such a notion of inhuman reason adopts a positive stance to alienation, following the proposition of the xenofeminist Laboria Cuboniks workgroup: "We are all alienated – but has it ever been otherwise?" (0x01). The collective similarly writes that the "construction of freedom involves not less but more alienation; alienation is the labor of freedom's construction,"[4] and that "nothing should be accepted as fixed, permanent, or 'given'—neither material conditions nor social forms."[5] Inhuman reason understands such positive alienation as a vector for the speculation and practical construction of new worlds, ones which would be more egalitarian and emancipatory not *despite* but *because of* their erosion through alienation. Xeno-planetarity in this sense constructs the present as a plastic, conditional medium impacting the construction of the future as an insurrectionary force, a soft power which is leveraged through an inhuman commitment. It provides an ethic for living on our alien planet.

Xenoplanetarity aims to open a space for updating the original notion of planetarity in at least two ways: 1) it assumes difference and alienation as a positive vector of integral sociality, and 2) building on the idea that technologies are fundamentally embedded within their social contexts and practices, it takes stock of the potential of repurposing and utilizing contemporary architectures and technologies towards socially rational ends.

xenoanthropology: destabilizing 'the human'

The first way to access xenoplanetarity consists in processing anthropological accounts which are currently expanding our understanding of what the human may have been yet is no longer. Anthropology is well poised to assess the contingent position of the human within a robust scientific discourse. Such a discourse essentially accepts the volition of narrative and social relations as an integral aspect of human habitation on the material site of the planet. Although post-colonial and decolonial accounts have been uncovering and detailing the life worlds of peoples and cultures which have lived outside of the popular notions of a 'western' historical past, the advancements in archeology and applied genetics have also provided access to human situations which had heretofore

remained wholly unknown, albeit potentially active in their latent presence.

This developing understanding of the modes of habitation of our human ancestors draws on the vastly expanding knowledgebases provided by contemporary archeological and genetic evidence, with technological advancements in carbon dating and gene analysis providing a view onto an expanding horizon of humanity's evolutionary and material past. Although the narratives about human prehistory and its cultures offered in both classical and recent anthropology are always narratively weighted, their material histories provide seminal orientation points handed down through material traces which help us to acquire a new understanding of our ancestors' (and our own) life worlds.[6]

From a philosophical standpoint, this gradual shift in understanding inevitably shows the partiality and ideological grounding of any single vision of humanity's past – quite obviously in any sense of divine origins as in the Biblical myth, but also in terms of the more recently enshrined and seemingly ubiquitous and determinative process of natural selection and its popular (and ultimately misconstrued) maxim of 'survival of the fittest.' Since the 1960s, anthro-pology has been redrawing some of the previously held popular notions of what humanity may have been in the past, while increasingly discovering the commonalities and differences in various peoples' practical modes of being. Such findings show that the accreted assumptions about the identity of the human have in no trivial sense been partial – an eminent example is the shift away from the traditional image of the male-centered savannah hunter which dominated the discourse of evolutionary anthropology over the second half of the 20th century, only to be exploded by the recent influx of traces and sources showing the diversity of human habitation in our deep cultural and evolutionary past. Popular accounts have been shown to be incomplete, spatially and temporally contingent and motivated, and in no way exhaustive of defining 'the human' as such.

By excavating the materiality of humanity within time scales exceeding classical western (or any other) historiographies, and by detailing and transforming our understanding about the cultures and historical moments of known ancient cultures, our understanding of humanity's planetary existence conclusively destabilizes a particular frame of species etiology. Most importantly that which has been handed down throughout the modern era –

i.e. that of the universality of the western concept of the human, as well as its attendant and latent narratives which often presume its historical destiny. No matter how particularly variegated the excavated facts are (as they are indeed as vastly different as the adaptability of inhuman reason), such appraisal of the heretofore unknown life worlds generates a shift in the conception of human universalism and the assumption of a single form of worlding as the measure of all.

It also helps to put in focus certain facts about humanity's life on the planet, for example, certain evolutionary bottlenecks, genetic make-up, or general material tendencies. Such destabilization can then be leveraged for productive use in reappraising humanity's past and exploring its potential repercussions for the present and future. By providing a robust material and archeological frame, such a project can be part of the wider reflection of the 'more-than-humanist' world and the practice of decolonization, and in that sense can help construct a more robust and viable planetary future.

The recent material findings furthermore variously hint at the intangible social constructs circumscribed by peoples' particular material conditions. The works of James C. Scott, David Graeber and David Wengrow have, for example, provided a vision of the way diverse human choreographies (like the construction of social alterity, migration, war and hospitality) have been unfolding at times extending into the early Neolithic period. Such findings often stand at odds from our mythical understanding of the human as a *homo economicus* which – at least in the popular contemporary arena – is used to naturalize capitalism as its ubiquitous habitus. Building on the expanding database of material artefacts, such scholarship brings to the fore the social adaptability, plasticity, and technological cunning of human cultures in relation to the planetary environment and each other.

But if one were to attempt to mine one common denominator for the activity of the human on the planet, it is the irreducible layer of sociality and social interaction. And it is here that the xenoplanetary comes to the fore as a metaphor indexing the anthropological landscape as it unfolds before us in the now. Anthropology in this sense opens a view on vast alternative modes of material and social subsistence where sociality and ambivalent, adaptive human collaboration become the protagonists of much of humanity's endeavors on the planet. In a fundamentally xenoplanetary gesture, this destabilizes

the enshrined concept of the human as an individuality, while never evacuating its pragmatic significance.

Another aspect which is particularly pertinent to xenology and its analysis of alienation and social difference is the very logic of producing social alterity. Gregory Bateson's original ethnographic observation of "schizmogenesis" as a defining feature of human (co)habitation has been Defined by Graeber and Wengrow as "[a] people's tendency to define themselves against one another."[7] The mechanisms of schizmogenesis may provide valuable insight for understanding the constitutive structuring of alterity and difference at the social level. If, following Bateson, difference develops as either a symmetric or complementary relation between two self-contained cultures, what might that say about the construction of difference today? To what degree can we consider the formulation of alterity from a constructivist perspective which would assume the formulation of the strange – the xeno – as an anthropogenic process of restructuring, salvaging, and repurposing?

Cemented philosophical traditions and their conceptual toolboxes often rely on the stabilized discourse of western thought which circumscribes the planet as a site of a particular givenness posing as universal.[8] By drawing on the ever-receding concept of the human, xenoplanetarity develops strategic inhumanism as an integral logic through which it may better perceive the incommensurability of cultural ontologies as they are manifest in the here and now while understanding their integral dynamic which tends towards alienation.

Such a view is importantly based in synthesis, both in the sense of 'being-with' as well as the artificial constructions of techné which mediate and foster connections, as both these aspects of the human situation come with an integral propensity for generating alienation. Xenoplanetarity may in this sense position itself as a practice and agency of response-ability by revisiting and restructuring the commitment to 'the human' on new grounds. If the postcolonial era has been grappling with an expanded view of humanity as always-already exceeding the western idiom, such an approach may provide a viable fold for a theory of planetarity supported by a rationally ethical and decolonial practice.

technodiversity and the question of access

The second tentative vector for constructing the concept of xenoplanetarity is found in the relationship of planetarity to technics. Various xeno-projects[9] of the 2010s often understood technics as a tool for expanding and synthesizing response-ability in complex negotiation with its community of users. This social embeddedness of tech finds its most factual example in the position of infrastructure technologies, whether we speak of access to energy, utilities or various digital environments which often come with their own set of digital divides. Such technology is enmeshed with people's life worlds to a vast degree, often ensuring the maintenance and reproduction of their habitation, and it is in this sense that comparative xenology assumes that infrastructures constitute one of the limits of alienation.

The technologies and infrastructures which attend the social frame today offer a concrete sphere which can help in framing the 'we' which encapsulates a given community, as any discourse comes with a particular linguistic and technological community of access. Such is the promise of xenoplanetarity: that a reappropriation of any "master's tools" within a consciously intersectional and inclusive culture may then come to signify differently – not as a set of calcified practices and technological infrastructure in the service of ideological or economic hegemony, but rather a necessary arena of negotiation which always tends to their shaping through democratic curation, adoption, and hacking. Such a frame then makes xenology particularly poised to offer potential critique or generate resistance.

Infrastructural technologies in this sense provide a fundamental vehicle for framing social alterity, insofar as they are ambient to various contemporary situations. Working through the procedural uncanny discussed in chapter Part II of this book, xenoplanetarity carries a particular optimism in relation to computation and the necessity of technical infrastructure to become more resilient and response-able to its users. Considering that infrastructures are oftentimes carriers of transgenerational social investment, they come to signify a shared, integral, and material phenomenon tied to questions of social praxis. The tendencies towards their capitalization and weaponization should not be accepted wholesale.

The threat of state and municipal infrastructures being coopted, privatized, and commodified is serious. Although the dynamic sphere of automation and infrastructural technology must be understood without the pervasive paranoia of essentialist or nativist mindsets so often associated with the procedural uncanny, the threats to such technological ecosystems is present and must be discussed in socially rational and democratic terms.

In a more philosophical sense, we can say that while Spivak's assertion that "The Globe is on our computers. No one lives there"[10] sees her attempting to decouple the social particularities of planetarity from the digital sphere, xenology works with the assumption that computation and material infrastructures have become infrastructural to the planetary condition, and that such a technical layer will continue to exist into the future and must be addressed through democratic discourse. In the post-internet era, digital environments and tools have furthermore become vastly distributed and have progressively overcoded the concept of the digital divide in favor of new (and not only digital) divides. At the planetary scale, technical and computational infrastructures are also intertwined with the question of accessibility of minerals, logistics networks, and politics associated with their attendant industries. It is not at all merely "the Globe" that is on our computers, but really the material of the planet – silica, copper, cadmium, palladium – which must be extracted, assembled, consumed and salvaged in order to be reintroduced into the market.

The vast splintering of digital space over the past two decades – from operational systems and application platforms to firewalls and multilingual online spaces – is supported by various degrees of infrastructural thickness and permeability, possibilities and impossibilities of access, porosity between various networks, as well as their dispositions towards systemic interoperability. Technological platforms and interfaces have in this way come to increasingly reflect the currently lived planetary positions and have come to overcode the monotechnological specter of a vast, hegemonic, digital globalism (which was a popular trope in the culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s and which Spivak implicitly critiques in her concept of planetarity).

The basic argument of xenoplanetarity doubles down on the assertion that the technological milieu always stands

in negotiation with social politics and that it is well poised to reflect the developing planetary alterity via technological means. In other words, technodiversity[11] is not a problem for xenoplanetarity, but rather its constitutive feature – the degrees of alterity and in/compatibility of certain hardwares, systems, platforms, ideologies and perspectives as they are manifest through the various technological milieux is regarded as a structural characteristic of the contemporary socio-technical landscape and has undeniably become a major vector for productive alienation. And it is here that xenoplanetarity adopts technology as a means for escaping the assumptions of an expansive digital monoculture in favor of becoming more involved with the manifest life worlds of the planet and the various state and private actors which develop, use, and shape it.

A large body of scholarship of recent years – i.e. the works of Benjamin Bratton, Jussi Parikka, Caroline Criado Perez, James Bridle or Shoshana Zuboff – has analyzed the inherent materiality of the technological and computational megastructures underwriting our contemporary technological environments, directly engaging with the diverse architectures which come to sense, filter, and disseminate choreographies of hospitality and alterity by technological means. Such scholarship has firstly shown the fragility of these infrastructures in relation to the chthonic powers of the planet – as in the guise of Latour's specifically destructive Gaia or Peter Ward's Medea – and, secondly, it has shown their fragility when faced with intentional disruption and cooptation by private enterprises or state actors.[12]

But the question of technodiversity as a political phenomenon comes with its own caveats. To follow the social constructivist assumption of schizmogenesis mentioned in the previous subchapter, a central consideration for the contemporary infosphere carried by computational infrastructures has to do with its possible weaponization.[13] Within the various technical environments of the 21st century, consciously manipulative disinformation mobilized and disseminated by various political actors has been playing a central role in structuring the ideological grounding of many populations, including the post-Soviet regions of central and eastern Europe.[14] The culture of disinformation and conspiracy can in this sense be understood as a practice of schizmogenesis which uses the digital sphere as an informational channel for active othering. But rather than developing within

a democratic idiom, it is often constructed and maintained within the confines of regressive nationalism, autocracy and ethnocentrism. Such weaponization of communications is a far cry from the productive alienation espoused by xenoplanetarity, insofar as it builds on a paranoid, nativist mindset. Technocapital has often been promulgated within the fascist politics of in-group and out-group, with a view to the aesthetics of the sublime and the politics of crisis. Comparative xenology rather stipulates that such conscious political manipulation is not commensurate with the rhythms and dynamics of social politics and its particular formulations of otherness and alterity, including those technologies which reproduce and sustain open societies and the always unbalanced dynamics of democracy.

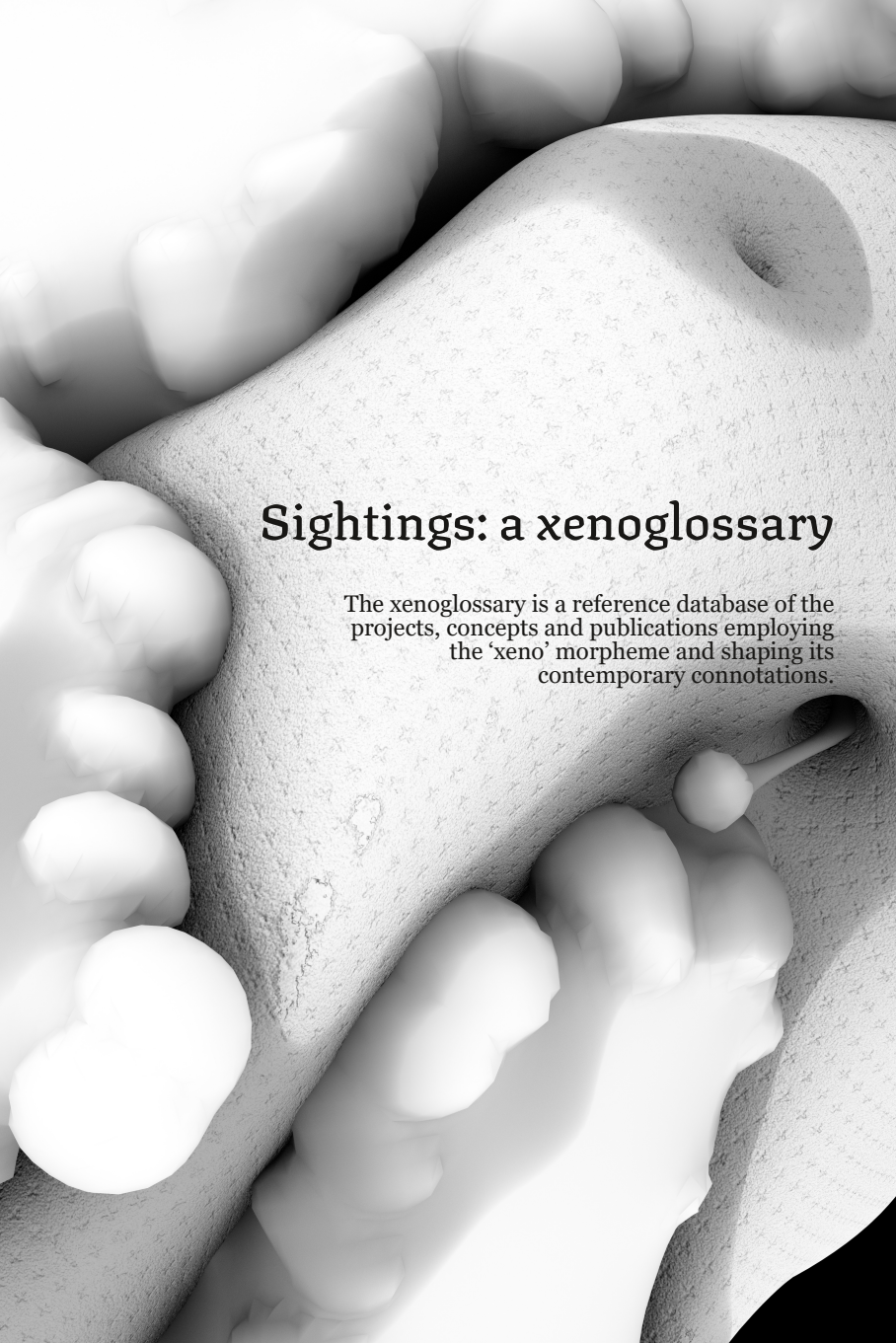
Unfortunately, the sublime state of exception and the aesthetics of political crisis can re-inscribe the xeno within the paranoid mentality of an 'us' in the service of a single, reductionist political agenda. The xeno is in this sense under constant threat of again becoming coopted within the language of xenophobia. The alterity of the xeno as presented throughout this publication and assumed by comparative xenology rather aims to retain its originary grounding in social and mesopolitical dynamics, which are most palpably cultivated at the level of civic, democratic society, with a view to the planet as a site with its own dynamics and imperatives. The alterity of the xeno must not be leveraged as a method to weaponize masses in order to achieve partisan political goals.

Xenoplanetarity in this sense assumes a particular resilience of transnational and planetary information flows. Such resilience against disinformation is not developed on the basis of an explicit ideology, but by careful study of the infrastructural dynamics which may mobilize, finance, disseminate, and reproduce such information and make it viable.

Xenology can in this sense serve as a form of inoculation against toxic forms of communication, providing the tools and means to identify and defuse the weaponizations of the xeno.

1. Gregory Bateson, “Form, Substance and Difference,” ETC: A Review of General Semantics, vol. 72, no. 1 (January 2015), 95.
2. Since its original framing by geologist Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer in 2000, the connotations of the term ‘Anthropocene’ have been considered for acceptance by the International Commission on Stratigraphy as well as the International Union of Geological Sciences. As of April 2022, neither institution has officially approved the term as a recognized subdivision of geological time. As of 2019, the Anthropocene Working Group has, however, ratified its adoption for denoting our contemporary post-Holocene epoch. See “Working Group on the ‘Anthropocene’,” Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy, accessed 14 June 2023, http://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/working-groups/anthropocene/.
Although undoubtedly impactful, the term is weighted on the side of the natural sciences, as a concept framed to interact with the geological taxonomy at geological time scales. Furthermore, the discussion of when exactly the Anthropocene starts (usually assessed based on the impact of human habitation on the planet) tends to infinitely regress – from the burning of fossil fuels in 19th-century England and the early-modern era, all the way back to the beginning of the 6th Great Extinction event with the destruction of megafauna, [see Elizabeth Kolbert, The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History (Henry Holt and Company, 2014).], or the even the first use of fire for hunting, impacting ecosystems and the amount of CO2 in the atmosphere. [J. Shuman, J. Balch, R. Barnes et al., “Reimagine Fire Science for the Anthropocene,” PNSA Nexus, vol. 1, no. 3 (July 2022).] It remains a speculative concept.
3. Reza Negarestani, “Labor of the Inhuman Part II: The Inhuman,” e-flux no. 53 (March 2014), accessed 10 June 2023, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/53/59893/the-labor-of-the-inhuman-part-ii-the-inhuman/.
4. Laboria Cuboniks, 0x01.
5. Laboria Cuboniks, 0x01.
6. We find such accounts in the anthropological work of Marshall Sahlins, Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, David Graeber, James C. Scott, and many others.
7. David Graeber and David Wengrow, The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity (Penguin Books, 2022), 56.
8. For example, the Amerindian multi-perspectivism proposed by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and other contemporary philosophies which draw on non-western knowledges challenge acquired philosophical understandings of human ontology – we can perhaps say that registering the manifest life worlds of both human and non-human actants within Castro’s multi-perspectivist naturalism shows the irreducible alterity of the Amerindian experience to that of the western settlers’ imaging. Such views open up to non-western traditions, and uncover political ontologies which cannot be wholly subsumed under the western philosophical apparatus as it currently stands.

9. The most salient examples those discussed previously in this book, i.e. xenofeminism and xenoarchitecture.
10. Spivak, An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization, 349.
11. Anders Dunker, "On Technodiversity: A Conversation with Yuk Hui," LA Review of Books (9 June 2020), accessed 1 July 2023, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/on-technodiversity-a-conversation-with-yuk-hui/.
12. A recent example can be seen in the fragility of ocean-laid fiberoptic cables or the ease with which natural gas pipes can be cut. (See for example Justin Salhani, "Why are people blaming Yemen's Houthis for cutting the Red Sea cables?," Al Jazeera (6 March 2024), accessed 18 August 2024, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/6/why-are-people-blaming-the-houthis-for-cutting-the-red-sea-cables; Shaun Walker, Ukrainian team blew up Nord Stream pipeline, claims report," The Guardian (15 August 2024), accessed 18 August 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/aug/15/ukrainian-team-blew-up-nord-stream-pipeline-claims-report; Robert Plummer, "Balkans hit by blackouts as heatwave persists," 21 June 2024, accessed 18 August 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4nn140qp4do.
13. The techno-politics of American technocapital and its coup on democratic rule of law in the US, or the top-down censorship in non-democratic regimes such as in Russia provide prime examples of neo-modernist means of mobilization alterity as a weapon.
14. For a great analysis of the recent structuring of the Russian ideological apparatus against the "decadent" gender politics of the west, see Petr Kratochvíl and Míla O'Sullivan, "A War Like No Other: Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a war on gender order," European Security, vol. 23, no. 3 (2023), 347-366; or Stefan Meister, "Isolation and Propaganda: The Root and Instruments of Russia's Disinformation Campaign," Transatlantic Academy 2015-2016 Paper Series, no. 6 (Transatlantic Academy, 2016).



Sightings: a xenoglossary

The xenoglossary is a reference database of the projects, concepts and publications employing the ‘xeno’ morpheme and shaping its contemporary connotations.

The Xenoglossary is a work in progress and will be updated. Some entries were written in collaboration with Dustin Breitling. If you have sighted a xenoproject, drop us a line at the Diffractions Collective website.

[*https://diffractionscollective.com/2024/04/19/xenology-a-xenoglossary/*]

X-A

xeno-agent – Reza Negarestani: "outsiders" and "Avatars of the outside [that] awaken the insurgent potential inherent to the State's Occult entities," (p. 82); "demons," (p. 116).
[*Reza Negarestani, Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials (Melbourne: re.press, 2008).*]

xenoarcheology – Robert A. Freitas Jr.: "the search for evidence of ancient visitation by interstellar travelers." Xenoarcheology has more recently been proposed as a field for further exploration for example in Ben W. McGee's essay "A call for proactive xenoarchaeological guidelines – Scientific, policy and socio-political considerations" which prompts the formulation of an axiomatic for archeological explorations in space. Xenoarcheology appears as a literary trope in many major 20th century sci-fi works, an eminent early example being Arthur C. Clarke's short story "The Sentinel" (1951).
[*Robert A. Freitas Jr., Xenology: An Introduction to the Scientific Study of Extraterrestrial Life, Intelligence, and Civilization, First Edition (Xenology Research Institute, Sacramento, CA: 1979); Ben W. McGee, "A call for proactive xenoarchaeological guidelines – Scientific, policy and socio-political considerations," Space Policy, vol. 26, no. 4 (November, 2010): 209-213.*]

xeno-architecture – Xeno-architecture was originally formulated by Armen Avanessian and Markus Miessen in the publication Crossbenching, where they propose a "a xeno-architecture of knowing." The idea was then further developed in the project Perhaps We Need a Xeno-Architecture to Match as a response to the "conceptual stagnation and fundamental miscommunication between on the one side a Critical attitude, with a capital C, being an end-in-itself, and on the other side a more and more complex, insecure, contingent (digital) world." (Bauwens). A performative event in Kaaitheater in Brussels was held in April 2017, and a collection of multilogues was published by Sternberg Press in 2018, featuring Armen Avanessian, Benjamin Bratton, Kathleen Ditzig, Daniel Falb, Anke Hennig, Victoria Ivanova, Markus Miessen, Luciana Parisi, and Patricia Reed.
[*Markus Miessen, Crossbenching (Sternberg Press, 2017); L. Bauwens, W. De Raeve, A. Haddad, Perhaps We Need a Xeno-Architecture to Match (Sternberg Press, 2018).*]

X-B

xenobiology – In a 1954 personal letter, Robert Heinlein describes a possible taxonomy of the 'xeno' morpheme on the particular example of biology (Wooster), proposing "xenobiology" as a better alternative to the prefix 'exo-' (i.e. 'exobiology') which he considers too nebulous and otherwise "tired and mean[ing] too many things." He proposes xenobiology as a speculative science of extraterrestrial physiology. Xenobiology was also recently proposed as a subfield within the field of synthetic biology with Budisa et al. defining it as "an emergent technoscience that combines advances in genetic engineering with the design of biological systems based on unusual biochemistries delivered by chemical compounds of mostly anthropogenic origin. Xenobiology enables us to create and study strange new life forms" (Budisa et al.). Ewen Chardonnet writes that "Synthetic biologists define Xenobiology as the study of any life-form departing from natural terrestrial life, whether on Earth or elsewhere." (Chardronnet) The preliminary statement of the first international conference on

xenobiology organized in Genoa in May 2014 states that "Xenobiology (XB) is the endeavor to overcome the constraints imposed by evolution on natural living organisms. It is an emerging field in the context of synthetic biology, encompassing the design, generation and evolution of alternative forms of life." (XB1) Aliens in Green (ed.) pithily reflect the ethical and institutional particularities of the XB1 conference in their publication The Laboratory Planet, no. 2 (2016).
[*Wooster, Harold. "Xenobiology." Science, vol. 134, no. 3473 (21 July 1961): 223-225; Budisa, Nediljko Prof.; Dr. Kubyshkin, Vladimir; Dr. Schmidt, Markus. "Xenobiology: A Journey towards Parallel Life Forms." (2 April, 2020): 2228-2231; Ewen Chardronnet, "Human Xenobiology," The Laboratory Planet, no. 2 (2016), accessed 7 July 2023, https://laboratoryplanet.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/LABORATORYPLANETn5.pdf; XB1, "The First Xenobiology Conference (XB1)," Biofaction channel, YouTube, accessed 7 July 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5Nb7QGRLyQ.*]

Xenoblade Chronicles – The video game is part of the Xeno series by Japanese game designer Tetsuya Takahashi. The original Xenoblade Chronicles game was published for the Nintendo Wii in 2010. In a 2022 interview Takahashi said that the "idea of 'foreign things becoming one' is something we have been trying to express since the time of Xenogears back in the day. A person's life is basically built up of relationships with other people. A relationship with foreign things. [...] The relationship between "Xeno" (foreign) things is at the core of the series that bears this name."
[*Tetsuya Takahashi and Koh Kojima, "Ask the Developer Vol. 6, Xenoblade Chronicles 3–Part 1," (26 July 2022), https://www.nintendo.com/whatsnew/ask-the-developer-vol-6-xenoblade-chronicles-3-part-1/.*]

xenobot – A popular account for Wired magazine defines xenobots as "living robots, made up of masses of cells working in coordination." (Simons) They were first developed in 2019 from the experimentation on the cells of the African Clawed Frog (Xenopus laevis), performed by Sam Kriegman, Douglas Blackiston, Michael Levin, and Josh Bongard, and eventually given the name xenobots. The team aimed to "demonstrate a scalable

approach for designing living systems in silico using an evolutionary algorithm, and we show how the evolved designs can be rapidly manufactured using a cell-based construction toolkit." (Kriegman et al.)
[*Matt Simons, "Meet Xenobot, an Eerie New Kind of Programmable Organism," Wired (13 January 2020), https://www.wired.com/story/xenobot/; Kriegman et al., "A scalable pipeline for designing reconfigurable organisms," PNAS vol. 117, no. 4 (13 January 2020): 1853-1859.*]

xenobuddhism – "Xenobuddhism is neither Buddhism nor accelerationism nor transhumanism. It is born from their convergence. It's Buddhism once exposed to the mutagen, the black liquid. It's the technocommercialist takeover of dharma in the realisation that techniques for realisation have outpaced humanity." [*Xenobuddhism, https://xenobuddhism.wordpress.com/*]

X-C

xenocapitalism – "consciousness – a phantasmatic surface-effect of [...] a kind of writing-machine. [...] This automation, vested in a generalised technicity, defines the contours of what insistently figures as the 'real.' It marks an event horizon between a hermeneutics of thought & the admission of the Freudian 'thing' – that thing that thinks – in which the work of comprehension (& work as such) is inscribed as if in advance of itself as the index of an impossible object."
[*Louis Armand, Entropologies (Anti-Oedipus Press, 2022), 56.*]

xenochemical (adj.) – Negarestani uses main nouns such as 'xeno-chemical Insider,' i.e. petroleum which is "not of the Earth but of the Outside" (p. 72); 'xeno-chemical particles,' i.e. "Outsiders" which are assembled by Dust on Earth as "components from different milieus so distant from one another that they can operate for each other only as outsiders." (p. 90); or 'xenochemical hydro-currents,' i.e. "what in ancient Greece was called cosmic wetness (hydrochemical singularities)." (p. 113).
[*Reza Negarestani, Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials (Melbourne: re.press, 2008).*]

Xenocosmography – Nick Land's handle on the Twitter/X platform since October 2023. "Anglotheosophical Oblique Escalation." [*https://x.com/xenocosmography*]

xeno-communication – Reza Negarestani: "Communications of data traffic based on the plane of being opened (by) instead of being opened (to)." [*Reza Negarestani, Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials (Melbourne: re.press, 2008), 244.*]

xeno-call – "...turning the outsider into an insider, the intensive operative of horror from within." [*Reza Negarestani, Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials (Melbourne: re.press, 2008), 203.*]

X-E

Xeno-epistemics – "makeshift kit for sounding visual art as knowledge [...] A thought never unfolds in one straight line. [...] the English rights of passage and traversal [is] the freedom to ramble. The mesh of trails, walkways, routes, footpaths has to be used regularly to keep the countryside open. Otherwise they can be clawed back by landlords and lapse into private ownership, into adjoining property, the land system of grid divisions, frames, borders, hedgerows, fences. The commons has to be affirmed again and again [...] [Sarat Maharaj, "Xeno-epistemics," Documenta 11, exhibition catalog (2002)]

xenoerotics – [*David Roden, Xenoerotics (London: Schism2 Press, 2023).*]

xenoestrogens – "'foreign' estrogens, substances that are close enough in molecular structure to estrogen that they can bind to estrogen receptor sites with potentially hazardous outcomes. Sources of Xenoestrogens include plastics, pesticides, chemicals, and water systems." (Oyelowo); "Xenoestrogens are particularly dangerous to animal and human health because they are persistent, ubiquitous chemicals in the environment that bioaccumulate

and may even be activated further as a result of biotransformation." (Wittliff et al.)
[*Tolu Oyelowo DC, "Estrogen Concepts," Mosby's Guide to Women's Health (2007), accessed 7 July 2023 in Science Direct, https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/neuroscience/xenoestrogen; J.L. Wittliff and S.A. Andres, in Encyclopedia of Toxicology (Third Edition), in Science Direct (2014), accessed 7 July 2023, https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/neuroscience/xenoestrogen.*]

xeno-euphoria – One of the three paths to freedom (the other two being Ravespace and Enlustment) in McKenzie Wark's recent analysis of rave practice. "Xeno-euphoria: mind submerged in flesh, chemically estranged into otherness." [Wark, 29]; "xeno-euphoria: Time becomes stringently horizontal. Neither rising nor falling, just sideways swelling and slimming. The body slots in, to time, finding itself stranded through itself, through losing the form of its being in time. I have to be patient, open, present for it. Let thinking flake off and fall away from the I. Then comes the pretty strangeness, into this body, out of the drugs it took, the beats it endures."
[*McKenzie Wark, Raving (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2023), 19.*]

xeno-excitation – excitations in their "wielders of human hosts" induced by "inorganic demons."
[*Reza Negarestani, Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials (Melbourne: re.press, 2008), 224.*]

X-F

xenofeminism – Xenofeminism (XF) was developed in 2014 by the Laboria Cuboniks collective (Diann Bauer, Katrina Burch, Lucca Fraser, Helen Hester, Amy Ireland, Patricia Reed) from the Berlin workshop "Emancipation as Navigation," organized by Reza Negarestani, Armen Avanessian and Pete Wolfendale. According to the "manifesto" Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation, XF is constructed as "a feminism of unprecedented cunning, scale, and vision; a future in which the realization of gender justice and feminist emancipation contribute to a universalist politics assembled from the needs of every human, cutting across race, ability, economic standing, and geographical

position. [0x01] [...] Xenofeminism is a rationalism. To claim that reason or rationality is 'by nature' a patriarchal enterprise is to concede defeat. It is true that the canonical 'history of thought' is dominated by men, and it is male hands we see throttling existing institutions of science and technology. But this is precisely why feminism must be a rationalism–because of this miserable imbalance, and not despite it. There is no 'feminine' rationality, nor is there a 'masculine' one." (0x04)
[*"Emancipation as Navigation: From the Space of Reasons to the Space of Freedoms," deontologistics, event brief, accessed 19 April 2024, https://deontologistics.co/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/emancipation-as-navigation-programme.pdf; Laboria Cuboniks, "Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation," laboriacuboniks.net (2015), accessed 6 June 2023, http://www.laboriacuboniks.net/20150612-xf_layout_web.pdf.*]

xeno-flesh – "Just fluctuating bundles of feelings and thoughts."
[*McKenzie Wark, Raving (Verso, 2023), 50.*]

X-G

Xenogenesis – A science fiction series by American author Octavia E. Butler, consisting of the novels Dawn(1987), Adulthood Rites (1988) and Imago (1989). The series untangles themes linked to genetic engineering, species survival, sexuality, gender, and race through the story of Lilith Iyapo. Waking up 250 years after a nuclear apocalypse, Lilith finds herself in the custody of the Oankali, an alien race that interbreeds with other species to create genetic hybrids and lifeforms.

Xenogender – Originally coined on user Baaphomett's Tumblr in 2014 as "xenogender: a gender that cannot be contained by human understandings of gender; more concerned with crafting other methods of gender categorization and hierarchy such as those relating to animals, plants, or other creatures/things." Pinkfruitgender later coined the nouns: "xip – the xenogender equivalent of boy, girl and enby [,] xenan –

the xenogender equivalent of man and woman [,] xenen – the xenogender equivalent of men and women"
[*Baaphomett's original post on the Wayback Machine: https://web.archive.org/web/20140701150845/http://baaphomett.tumblr.com/post/89738557605/ive-done-a-lot-of-thinking-about-identity-and;*
Genderwiki: https://gender.fandom.com/wiki/Xenogender]

Xenoglossy – Considered the miraculous use of language that one does not know or has not learned. Xenoglossy was considered a major component of Medieval Culture as explored by the scholarly work of Christine Cooper-Rompato.

Christine Cooper-Rompato's study on female xenoglossia in the late medieval period reveals that the gift of tongues was a crucial aspect of religious culture, particularly in saints' lives and canonization procedures from the twelfth to fifteenth century. Cooper-Rompato connects this phenomenon to the apostolic model, the rise of mendicants, and a growing emphasis on preaching, missionary work, and accurate translation. In a society deeply concerned with the process and consequences of biblical translation, xenoglossia seemed to offer a solution by promising complete equivalence between languages and a desire for "pure translation" that does not alter the text in any way.

However, Cooper-Rompato argues that instances of xenoglossia were clearly gendered. While men received long-lasting gifts of tongues for large-scale preaching and conversion, women's gifts were more limited in scope and duration, often occurring in semiprivate settings and emphasizing vulnerability and a lack of control over the language. The female saints Cooper-Rompato cites, such as Clare of Montefalco and Colette of Corbie, received brief gifts of xenoglossia to help themselves or others in specific moments, unlike men whose xenoglossia contributed to their reputation as preachers and teachers.
[*Cooper-Rompato, Christine F.. The Gift of Tongues: Women's Xenoglossia in the Later Middle Ages, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010.*]

X-H

xenobiotics / xenohormones – Anthropogenic chemicals contained in plastics, petrochemically derived pesticides, emulsifiers found in soaps and cosmetics, or meat from industrially-grown livestock have been found to be disruptive of human hormonal and reproductive health. "The endocrine-disrupting effects of many xenobiotics can be interpreted as interference with the normal regulation of reproductive processes by steroid hormones." (Danzo)
[*B.J. Danzo, "The effects of environmental hormones on reproduction," CMLS (1998): 1249-1264; Lenka Veselá, ed., Synthetic Becoming (Litomyšl: K. Verlag and Brno FaVU, 2022).*]

X-L

Xenolanguage – "A story game for 3-5 players in 3-4 hours. [...] Xenolanguage is a game about first contact with alien life, messy human relationships, and what happens when they mix together. Play centers on the Platform: a custom channeling board of mysterious origin. Use a planchette-like Lens to channel over alien symbols as you receive and interpret messages. Players will progressively discover meanings for the alien symbols on the board, grapple with what they learn, and experience how it changes them. The base game of Xenolanguage includes a custom channeling board with 30 alien symbols, planchette-like lens, story deck and digital soundscapes. This game takes inspiration from soulful sci-fi stories (Arrival, Story of Your Life, Contact, Interstellar and many more) but you'll tell your own story."
[*"Xenolanguage," Thorny Games (2024), accessed 15 April 2024, https://thornygames.com/pages/xenolanguage-a-game-about-alien-language-and-human-memory.*]

xenology – The science of the xeno, its contemporary meanings and semantic permutations in time. Originally developing from the sci-fi worlds of Robert Heinlein, it was later adopted by writers such as Boris and Arkady Strugacky, Robert J. Freitas or artist Krzysztof Wodiczko. Robert J. Freitas proposes it as a catch-all

term for the study of extraterrestrial intelligence and artefacts of alien (i.e. non-terrestrial) provenance. [*Robert A. Freitas, "Naming Extraterrestrial Life," Nature vol. 301 (January 1983): 106.*]

X-M

Xenomars – Producer and artist based in London, UK. #web3music #nftmusic #techno #breakcore #IDM [*Alex Mazey, "Neo-China Arrives from the Future," interview with Xenomars, Public Pressure (2023), accessed 7 July 2023, https://magazine.publicpressure.io/neo-china-arrives-from-the-future/*]

Xenomelia – also known as Body Integrity Identity Disorder (BIID) or Amputee Identity Disorder, is a rare psychiatric condition characterized by a persistent desire to acquire a physical disability, often in the form of a specific body part amputation or paralysis. Individuals with xenomelia feel that a certain body part, such as a limb, doesn't belong to them or that they would feel more "complete" without it.

Xenomoney – The term is derived from Brian Rotman's work, In Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero. Rotman investigates into how the sign for zero fundamentally transformed arithmetic calculations, the practice of perspectival painting, and the nature of economic exchange. Zero functions for number signs in a manner akin to how the vanishing point operates in perspectival images, just as imaginary money relates to number signs. Further he defines the xeno dimension of xenomoney "as the threatened collapse of the world money system from the past, from unsupportable debt… the money part of it threatens… collapse from the future, from an unsustainable mutability of money signs created by the financial futures markets." Unlike traditional forms of money backed by gold or other commodities, xenomoney is divorced from any external source of 'intrinsic' value by fiat (decree). As a sign, xenomoney is forced to create its own signified, its own perceived value, written in terms of its future states. [*Brian Rotman, Signifying nothing: The semiotics of Zero (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001).*]

xenomorph – A fictional endoparasitoid extraterrestrial species, the main antagonist in the Alien film series. Its form was derived from H.R. Giger's Necronom IV (1976) print and was played by Bolaji Badejo in the original film.

X-P

Xeno-patterning – For Luciana Parisi, in the realm of contemporary artificial intelligence, particularly in the field of machine learning, the concept of alienness takes on a new and profound significance. Unlike traditional models of computational cognition that rest upon the deductive logic of symbolic AI, the post-Turing shift towards interactive computing reveals that incomputables play a crucial role in the generation of novel patterns that are not pre-programmed for a specific task.

Paraphrasing Parisi, alienness becomes central to the very process of pattern formation. However, this also diverges from synonymising alienness with the indeterminacy of thought or shattering the recursive reproduction of patterns. Instead, alienness is intrinsically woven into the logic of fallibility, accounting for how indeterminacy transforms the transcendental order of conceptual thinking into a xeno-patterning for counter-factual image-models. [*Luciana Parisi (2019) XENO-PATTERNING, Angelaki, 24:1, 81-97*]

xenopedia – The wiki for the Alien vs. Predator franchise, operating since 2006.
[*Xenopedia, accessed 7 July 2023, https://avp.fandom.com/wiki/Main_Page.*]

xenophenomenology –Dylan Trigg defines it as an "unhuman phenomenology [...] a phenomenology that runs against the notion that description is a guarantor of truth [...] a genuine alien phenomenology in that it is concerned with the limits of alterity." Trigg considers it to be a solution to phenomenology's contemporary stasis.
[*Dylan Trigg, The Thing: A Phenomenology of Horror (Zero books, 2014), 6.*]

Xenoplanetary – Alistair Rennie's sixth album, released in 2023 as part of his sonic project Ruptured World. It is the fourth work in the "Planetary" concept series (Exoplanetary, Archeoplanetary and Interplanetary) released under the Cryo Chamber label. "Enter a domain of ultimate strangeness—an alien eco-system of forested peaks and escarpments that conceal a raft of secrets in the hidden valleys that lie among them." (Cryo Chamber Bandcamp)
[*Alistair Rennie, official site, https://alistairrennie.wixsite.com/alistair-rennie/ruptured-world.*]

xenopoetics – A poetics collusive with outside agency. "Xenopoetics has something to do with composing out of distorted materials. One page is missing, one or two lines are pseudonymously or anonymously quoted, one scene leaks from the future to the past, an object evades chronological sequences, a number turns into a cipher, everything looms as an accentuated clue around which all subjects aimlessly orbit, leading into an eclipsed riddle whose duty is not to enlighten but to make blind (aporos to the light)." (Negarestani, xviii)

Amy Ireland has written a dissertation on the topic, remarking in an interview with A. J. Carruthers: "Very crudely stated, there is an outside to experience that informs it, yet cannot be known by experience. Xenopoetics takes this notion of the outside its area of concern and devises tactics for the cultivation of traffic between this space and the restricted economy of human-conditioned representation, which, significantly, includes language. Technological excruciation, structural porosity, corrupted authorship, numerical incursion, inauthenticity, encryption, temporal leakage, formal horror, perverse topologies... these things all have their place in a xenopoetic arsenal." (Carruthers, 94)
[*A.J. Carruthers, "Poetry is Cosmic War," interview with Amy Ireland, Rabbit Poetry Journal, no. 17 (February 2016); Amy Ireland, Xenopoetics: Time, Matter, Transmission, dissertation for UNSW Sydney (2019), accessed 7 July 2023, https://unsworks.unsw.edu.au/entities/publication/1df83b9c-b2ef-4ee7-be39-2266263cda43; Reza Negarestani, Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials (Melbourne: re.press, 2008).*]

xeno-power / xeno-solidarity – Aliens in Green define xeno-power as collusive with "an alien capitalism, denying present and past humankind ontologies." They propose xeno-solidarity as a force which may foster "alien resilience" in the face of the "anti-terrestrial spirit of capitalism."
[*Aliens in Green, "Aliens in Green," Mary Magic (2023), accessed 7 July 2023, https://maggic.ooo/Aliens-in-Green; Aliens in Green, "Becoming Non-Alien," Synthetic Becoming, Lenka Veselá, ed., (Litomyšl: K. Verlag and Brno FaVU, 2022).*]

X-S

Xenoscience, Eden Institute of – "The Institute specializes in xenobiology, xenology, xenopsychology, xenodiplomacy and xenolinguistics, although it also covers many related disciplines. It collects information from all known alien biospheres and cultures, sending out expeditions to study new alien species and acting as consultants on all forms of human-alien interactions. It has branch institutes located on practically every world with living intelligent aliens, and many local universities educating bionts in trans-species interaction." The Orion's Arm Universe Project is a collective world-building effort set in "a scenario set thousands of years in the future where civilization spans the stars. Godlike ascended intelligences rule vast interstellar empires, and lesser factions seek to carve out their own dominions through intrigue and conquest."
[*Encyclopedia Galactica, "Eden Institute of Xenoscience" Orion's Arm Universe Project (2023), accessed 7 July 2023, https://www.orionsarm.com/eg-article/4793e4a2c1030.*]

Xenoslavia – The Šum collective of Slovenia published their issue no. 16 (September 2021) under the title Xenoslavia: Covert Chronologies. In her essay "A Peculiar Transformation," Enea Kačič develops a speculative history for the year 2020: "After Yugoslavia was renamed Xenoslavia, the Western imperial order watched the implementation of quadratic financing, quadratic voting and radical markets with increasing bewilderment and a growing zeal for military intervention, as young people from France, Germany, the UK and

even the USA suddenly began to identify with values radically different from Western ones," (p. 2196). Editor Tisa Troha gives the following shout-out in her "Introduction": "To paraphrase Nick Land: 'Read Xenoslavia, and vibe...'"
[*Maks Valenčič, Tisa Troha, eds., Xenoslavia: Covert Chronologies, Šum no. 16 (Ljubljana: Družstvo Galerija Books, 2021).*]

xenosystems – Nick Land's original Outside In blog at xenosystems.net. Now available through the Wayback Machine at [*https://web.archive.org/web/20180213122613/http://www.xenosystems.net/*].

X-T

xenotation – Appeared on the Hyperstition blog in 2004 as "tic xenotation" – a system for "the formulation of numeric conventions independent of all cultural conditioning or local convention," designed by the fictional Daniel C. Barker and emerging during "the highly obscure phase of his life when he was working for 'NASA' (some hesitation is appropriate here) on the SETI-related 'Project Scar' in Southeast Asia, tasked with designing a 'general purpose decryption protocol' for identifying intelligent signal from alien sources."
[*Hyperstition blog (7 July 2004), http://hyperstition.abstractdynamics.org/archives/003538.html*].

xenotemporality – A concept by Laboria Cuboniks member Diann Bauer for her PhD dissertation project at the Westminster School of Arts: "Xenotemporality (XT) is based on the idea that the human experience of time has historically guided our conception of it but that this anthropogenic conception of time is too parochial for our current needs. The primacy of human phenomenological experience of time is no longer sufficient for how we organise, inflect and orient the systems we have created because these systems function on scales beyond the experiential capacity of the human." Fellow colleague Patricia Reed considers Diann's XT as "extra-human" time.
[*Diann Bauer, "Xenotemporality," UK Research and Innovation, accessed 15 April 2024, https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=studentship-2299043;*

Patricia Reed, "Xenotemporality and Infrastructures for Survival. In Commemoration of Diann Bauer," Youtube, 'ViennaUP' channel (8 July 2022), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmfoKdSnoMI.]

xenotext – An ongoing bio-art work by experimental Canadian poet Christian Bök. Bök aims to encode a poem as a strand of DNA and implant it into the extremophile bacterium Deinococcus radiodurans. The bacterium would then read this strand of DNA and produce a protein which is also an intelligible poem. The bacterium would be sent to space as a testament to human presence in the cosmos. Louis Armand writes that "What sets Bök's The Xenotext apart" from other messages sent by humanity to extraterrestrial space "is its ambivalent status as artefact; neither aesthetic commodity nor message-to-the-cosmos in any straightforward sense, it represents an autopoiēsis founded in biological cybernetics – an attempt, as Bök says, at a 'living poetry.' Its medium is the stuff of evolution."
[*Aaron Soupouris, "The prose at the end of the universe: Programming 'indestructible' bacteria to write poetry," Engadget (30 December 2015), accessed 8 July 2023, https://www.engadget.com/2015-12-30-christian-bok-the-xenotext-bacteria-poetry.html; Louis Armand, Entropology (Anti-Oedipus Press, 2022).*]

xenotopia (D. H. Lewis) – Darcy Hudleson Lewis' dissertation entitled "Xenotopia: Death and Displacement in the Landscape of Nineteenth-Century American Authorship" (2017) defines 'xenotopias' as "strange places wherein a venerated American landscape has been disrupted or defamiliarized and inscribed with death or mourning. As opposed to the idealized settings of utopia or the environmental degradation of dystopia, which reflect the positive or negative social currents of a writer's milieu, xenotopia[s] record the contingencies and potential problems that have not yet played out in a nation in the process of self-definition."
[*Darcy Hudleson Lewis, "Xenotopia: Death and Displacement in the Landscape of Nineteenth-Century American Authorship," dissertation, UNT (2017), accessed 8 July 2023, https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1062864/.*]

xenotopia (Dr. Who) – "Xenotopia was a small planet at the edge of the universe. During the Last Great Time War, the War Master used it as one of his bases of operations."
[*'Xenotopia,' Tardis Wiki, accessed 8 July 2023, https://tardis.fandom.com/wiki/Xenotopia.*]

Xenotopia (song) – "Xenotopia" is the sixth single by j-pop singer Mimori Suzuko. Released on 25 May 2016, it peaked at #8 on the Oricon single chart.
[*"Xenotopia," j-pop wiki, Fandom, accessed 8 July 2023, https://jpop.fandom.com/wiki/Xenotopia#cite_note-1.*]

Xenotopia, Vol. 1 (magazine) – Radical Openness, Chronocommons, Eastern Futurism, Manifesto Reflux, Psychogeography, Great Flood, Anachrony, Necropolitics, Specters Cataclysm.
[*Zsolt Miklósvölgyi and Márió Nemes, Xenotopia Vol. 1 (ISBN Books and Gallery, 2020).*]

X-W

xenowar – A speculative concept for a "war that is both new and familiar" proposed by Tom Sear. "Xenowar is the Clausewitzean trinity spun in recursive loops of alterity, where conflict diagonalizes into an inhuman, alien cognition [...] from this black hole of Xenowar will pulse another type of Un-War, fought at the edges of the incomputable [...]"
[*Tom Sear, "Xenowar Dreams of Itself," Springer Nature: Digiwar, (Jul 23, 2020):1–8.*]

Xenowars (video game) – "A turn-based strategy/RPG game set in the stars [...] recruit a team of experts on Earth for exploring a distant alien homeworld, choosing between scientists, mutants, and soldiers. Scour the planet for lost alien technology and uncover the secrets to Earth's doom."
[*Strategeions Studios, released 24 October 2024.*]

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Glossary of names (ctrl-F in pdf):

Avanessian, Armen; **Bauer**, Diann; **Bednář**, Kamil; **Benveniste**, Émile; **Bourriaud**, Nicolas; **Butler**, Octavia; **Braidotti**, Rosi; **Bratton**, Benjamin; **Cuboniks**, Laboria; **Crenshaw**, Kimberle; **Derrida**, Jacques; **Eshun**, Kodwo; **Easterling**, Keller; **Fisher**, Mark; **Freitas** Jr., Robert J.; **Freud**, Sigmund; **Gabrys**, Jennifer; **Goh**, Annie; **Gleeson**, Jules Joanne; **Graeber**, David; **Haraway**, Donna; **Heinlein**, Robert; **Heidegger**, Martin; **Hester**, Helen; **Ivanova**, Victoria; **Jeffers**, Robinson; **Kristeva**, Julia; **Land**, Nick; **Leroi-Gourhan**, André; **Lyotard**, Jean-François; **Mackay**, Robin; **Meillassoux**, Quentin; **Negarestani**, Reza; **Parisi**, Luciana; **Plant**, Sadie; **Scott**, James C.; **Spivak**, Gayatri Chakravorty; **Srnicek**, Nick; **Stiegler**, Bernard; **Strugatsky**, Arkady and Boris; **Veselá**, Lenka; **Wajcman**, Judy; **Wengrow**, David; **Wilson**, Emily; **Wodiczko**, Krzysztof.

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